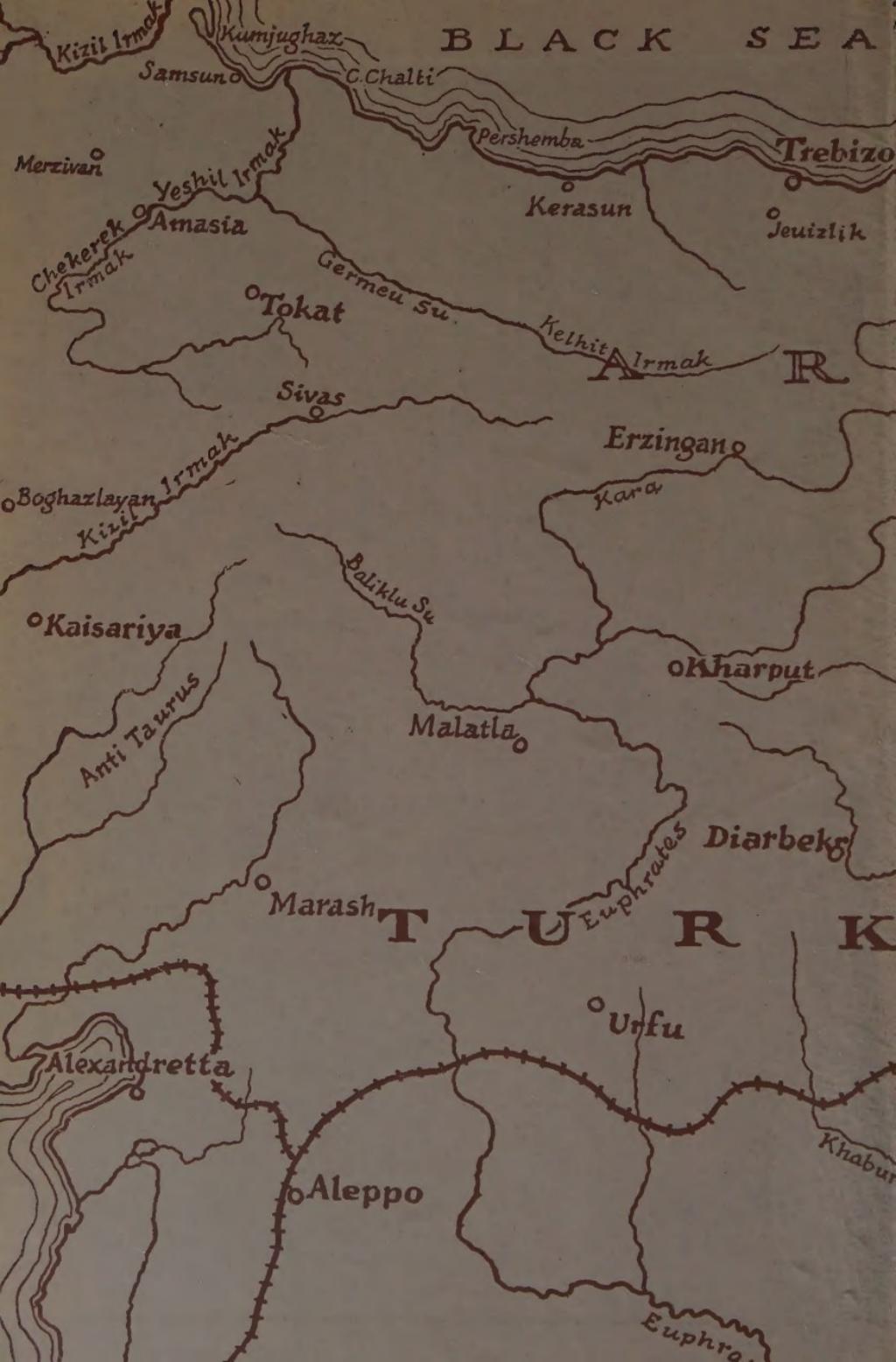
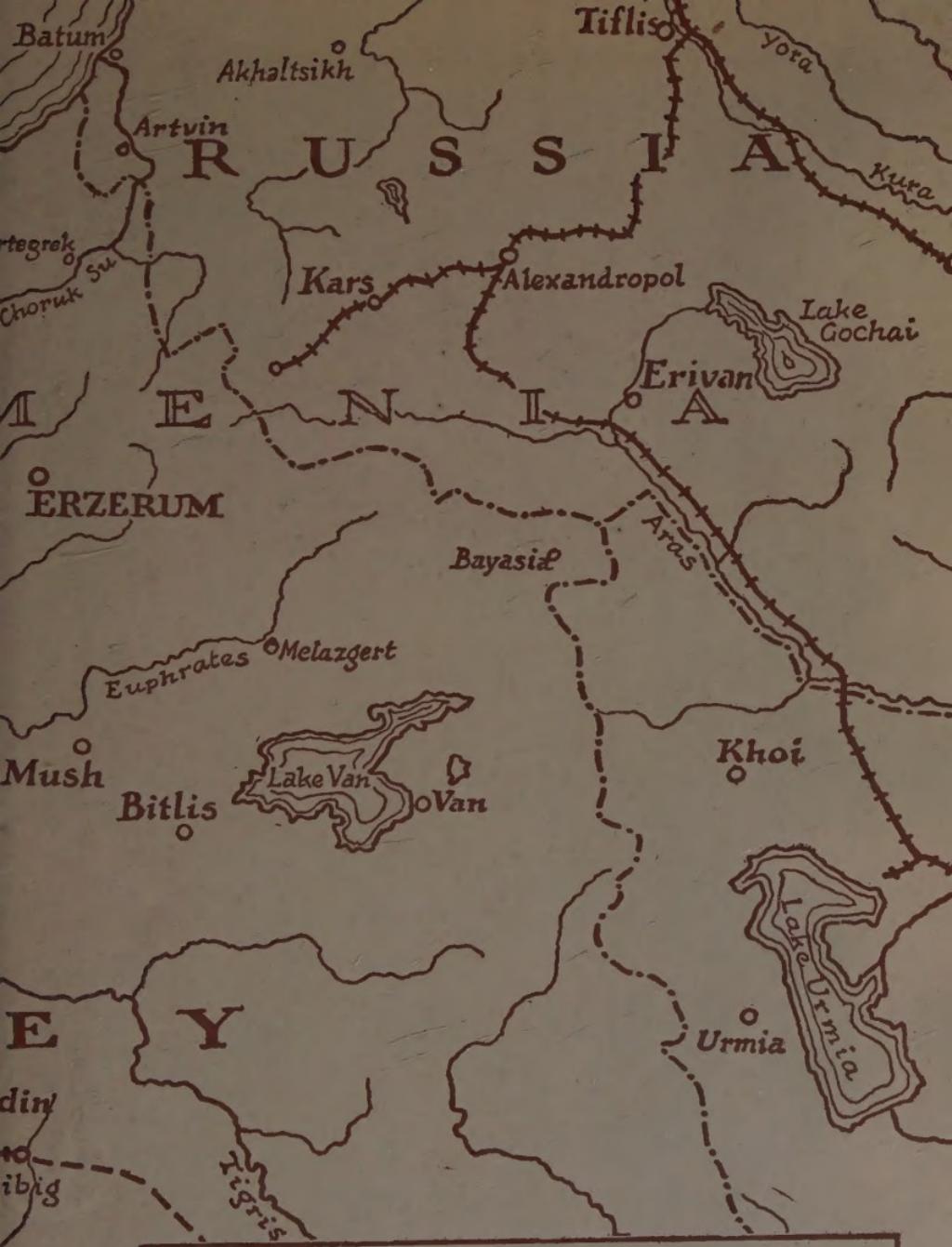


THE PATH OF GLORY

JOSEPH HOCKING

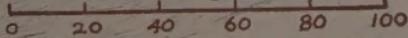
BLACK SEA





Map of The Path of Glory

Scale of English Miles



THE PATH OF GLORY

**JOSEPH HOCKING'S
GREAT WAR STORIES**

ALL FOR A SCRAP OF PAPER
THE CURTAIN OF FIRE
DEARER THAN LIFE
THE POMP OF YESTERDAY
TOMMY
TOMMY AND THE MAID OF ATHENS

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The Soul of Dominic Wildthorne
Follow the Gleam
David Baring
The Trampled Cross

**HODDER AND STOUGHTON
WARWICK SQUARE, LONDON, E.C.**

THE PATH OF GLORY

BY
JOSEPH HOCKING

Author of 'All for a Scrap of Paper,' 'Dearer than Life,'
'The Curtain of Fire,' etc.

'Not once nor twice in this rough Island story,
The path of duty is the path of glory'

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

1918

FOREWORD

THIS story is too much a romance of love and adventure to be called a novel of contemporary history. All the same, it is more than a romance, and its descriptions are, as far as I could make them, true to fact.

In the great struggle through which we are passing, and which is still convulsing the world, our attention has been so centred on affairs in the West, that we have hardly been able to realize that tremendous drama in the Near East, where an ancient and cultured race has been well nigh annihilated. We have thought so much of German devilry in Belgium, in France, and on the high seas, that we have taken but little notice of the fact that, using the Turks as their tools, they played a part in Armenia which even out-Heroded their treatment of the Belgians. When we remember that, largely owing to the Huns' influence and plottings, three-quarters of a race which in 1914 comprised over two million people, have been done to death, it will be seen that even the fate of the Belgians is almost bright when compared with that of the Armenians.

This is a story of the romantic side of that grim tragedy; a story of a youth with an English upbringing, who found himself in Armenia on an adventurous mission when the war broke out—of what he saw, and what he did. As far as I know, I have taken no liberties with facts, and certainly I have not over-coloured anything. I have spared myself no trouble in studying the history of the whole movement, and readers may rest assured that the events narrated are in harmony with what actually took place.

To any critics who would say that as a story THE PATH OF

GLORY is *improbable*, I would reply firstly, that it is a romance of a romantic country, and secondly, that to use the words of a popular novelist, 'the war has driven that word from our vocabulary, and melodrama has become the prosiest realism.'

One more necessary word. More than once during the narrative, the principal character gives expression to strong opinions concerning the attitude of America. These opinions may seem, in the light of recent events, ungracious and untrue. No one rejoices more than I because of the stand which America has taken, or admires more the magnificent wholeheartedness with which she has thrown herself into this struggle for the world's liberty, but it must be remembered that this story was written before the Government of that great people "found its soul." It expresses, moreover, what was largely felt at the time, and so, although I may seem ungracious, I let everything stand as it was first written.

JOSEPH HOCKING.

PRIOR'S CORNER,
TOTTERIDGE,
June, 1917.

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CHAPTER I

THE CONFESSION

ADMIRAL TRENCROM was troubled. In his eyes was an anxious look, on his honest weatherbeaten face were evidences of distress.

'Before discussing your future, Victor,' he said, 'I have something to tell you.'

'Is it important, dad ?'

'Very. I ought to have told you before, but I was afraid.'

'Afraid ! You afraid !' There was amusement as well as incredulity in the tones.

'Yes, afraid. There were other reasons for my being silent, but certainly it was fear that kept me from speaking.'

'Fear ! Fear of what ?'

Admiral Trencrom was silent for a few seconds. He seemed to have difficulty in finding the words with which to express his thoughts.

They were sitting alone in the library of the old house which had belonged to the Trencroms for many generations. Outside the wind howled, while at times the surge of the sea was plainly to be heard. Sometimes the rain pattered against the windowpanes.

Trencrom Manor, by which name the house was known, was by no means a mansion, although it was the most important in the immediate district, even as Admiral Trencrom was regarded as the most important man in that part of Cornwall. The Trencroms had almost invariably been sailors, rugged as the granite hills which surrounded the old house, fearless as Nelson, and fighters always. There were Trencroms among the British Tars who fought the Spanish dons in Elizabeth's days, and while they never obtained great renown like the Granvilles, none were more loyal and daring.

That, perhaps, was why there was a note of disbelief in the young man's voice, and why a look not unlike fear came into his own eyes.

'Fear of the pain I might give you,' said the old Admiral, 'fear that I might lose you.'

'Lose me! I don't understand.'

'No, the secret has been well kept.'

'Secret! what secret?'

The Admiral went towards the window and looked out. The time was winter—January of 1914 had not come to an end, and the dark day was rapidly dying. Through the bare branches of the trees the sea was still visible, but it did not suggest the sea which the Admiral loved. It was grey and sullen.

'Come, dad, don't keep me in suspense any longer. It's—it's—not like you.'

'No, forgive me, my boy. I'll tell you at once. It's rather a long story, but—but—'

Again he lapsed into silence, and continued looking towards the heaving sea. As Victor had said, this was not like the Admiral, who always advocated frankness and fearlessness. It is true, as the older villagers said, that he was not quite like his father and grandfather had been. They were in the habit of speaking before they thought, and of acting on impulse rather than on reflection. Still the Admiral was a true Trencrom, a man who never shirked danger, and faced the worst without flinching.

'When, last night, you asked me to advise you with regard to the future,' he went on presently, 'I asked you to wait until to-day. Perhaps you have wondered why you were not sent to sea, as nearly all the Trencroms have been, wondered too why I sent you to Cambridge, and encouraged you in your evident desire to be a scholar. None of the Trencroms in the past,' and he laughed grimly, 'have ever had enough scholarship to cover a threepenny piece.'

'Still, I—I don't understand, dad.'

'No,' and here the old Trencrom habit of meeting the worst at once revealed itself. 'The truth is, Victor, you are not my son.'

The young man looked at the other with terror in his eyes.

'Not your son!' he gasped.

'Not my son. Now you see why I was afraid to speak. Physical fear!—thank God, I don't know the meaning of it! All the same, I've been a coward. I never had a son. The good God denied one to me. Perhaps that was why—— I say, Victor, don't look at me like that!'

For the young man's face had become bloodless, while his eyes shone with an unearthly light. His lips were quivering too, and he started to his feet and moved rapidly towards his father.

'But, dad! Not your son! Great Heavens, who am I then?'

'Bear with me, my boy, I'll tell you everything, hard as it may be.'

'Hard! Do you mean that some disgrace attaches to me. That I am some gutter brat that—that you picked up and reared out of charity?'

'No, nothing of the sort. There is nothing dishonourable, nothing to be ashamed of. But—but, Victor, have you never suspected that—that you were not an English boy?'

'Not an English boy! Heavens, no! Why should I?'

'I often wondered,' and the Admiral glanced around the walls of the room as he spoke. 'There are the old Trencroms, and every man of them had light blue eyes, light hair, and fair skin. We were all what the people around here call "stuggy" men: short, and thickly built. You, on the other hand, are tall, dark, with black eyes and hair. There is no suggestion of the Trencrom about you.'

'But mother was a Tremain,' stammered Victor, 'I always thought I had taken after her.'

'The Trencrom boys always took after the Trencroms,' and there was a suggestion of pride in the Admiral's voice. 'Think of my brother George's boys. His girls are dark, but the boys are Trencroms, and both of them sailors.'

'Then,' said Victor, 'who am I? What am I? I say, dad, tell me that all this is a joke, a ghastly nightmare—anything but the truth!'

'I can't, my boy. It's true, worse luck, it's true.'

'Then—then who am I? For God's sake tell me.'

'Mind,' said the Admiral, 'all that I have to say need make no difference to us. We—we can be just the same to each other.'

'The same! How can we be? I am not your son. I—I—But tell me, dad.'

'I tell you, it need make no difference. My brother George knows, but no one else. It need make no difference to your future. We can go on just as we've been going. You can still stay at Cambridge and get your fellowship, or George will take you into his business. Anyhow, you can still remain my son, and what I have, that is this house, the farms, and the money will come to you, just as if—that is George is willing. He's a rich man, and his children will have more than they need. I've no one but you, Victor, and no son was ever dearer to his father than you are to me. As far as that goes we never need let any one know that you are not an English boy, or that you are not a Trencrom.'

'Not an English boy! I say, dad!'

There was pain almost amounting to agony as he spoke. It might seem as though he suddenly felt himself to become a pariah, an outcast.

'Listen, my boy, and forgive me for keeping you in the dark so long; forgive me for giving you pain. God knows I would have saved you if I could, but—but—'

The Admiral passed his thick hairy hand over his eyes, as if to wipe away the mists that had gathered there.

'Victor, my boy,' he went on. 'Have you never wondered that I, who have never taken the slightest interest in scholarships, who never read a book, except those on seafaring, and travel in distant lands, should have encouraged you to study Eastern languages?'

'I thought it was awfully good of you,' replied Victor. 'I—I thought—when you saw I picked up the Eastern tongues easily, that—that you just good-humouredly gave way to my fads.'

There was something deeper than that, my boy. I spoke to your professors and told them to encourage you. I—I thought I ought.'

'But why?'

'Because you came from the East, Victor.'

'I came from the East!'

'Yes. Listen, my boy, while I try to tell my story in my own way. Nearly twenty years ago, while my father was alive, I was

at Portsmouth. I had a house there, for the Government had given me a job which necessitated my living there. Let me see, it was in 1895, I think, and I was asked to take the chair at a meeting, which had been arranged to raise funds to help the Armenians. You have read their story. You know that they have again and again been harried, persecuted, outraged, murdered by those devilish Turks.'

The young man did not speak a word. He stood still looking at the Admiral, his eyes flashing, his hands nervously clenching and unclenching themselves.

'As you know,' went on the Admiral, 'they are a great people. They are among the most ancient people on earth. They are great in scholarship, in commerce ; they are responsible for what little civilization there is in that rotten Turkish Empire. But for them Christianity would not exist in Asia Minor. They have stood by their faith in face of every form of suffering, and death. You know that ?'

'Yes, I know that,' said Victor's voice was hard.

'The principal speaker at the meeting was an escaped Armenian. He was a scholar, and a gentleman. He belonged to one of the oldest families of that ancient race. He lived up at Van, by the great Lake Van, and was looked up to by the Armenians as a leader. I don't know much about it, but I suppose that in that district they form the principal part of the population.'

'That was in the time of Abdul the Damned,' said Victor, who did not seem to be conscious of the fact that he had spoken.

'Yes,' replied the Admiral, noting the tone of Victor's voice. 'He seemed set upon destroying them because they were Christians, and because they were educated and prosperous. Of course, his plea was that they were plotting treason, and so he had to teach them a lesson. He said that the Armenians were planning to set up an independent State in the Turkish Empire, and so the work of hell commenced.'

'I have read about it,' said Victor. 'It made my blood run hot and cold as I read it. It seemed to me that the Powers acted a criminal part in standing supinely by.'

For the moment he seemed to have forgotten the purport of the Admiral's story, in his interest in the oppressed race.

'This man,' went on the Admiral, 'that is, the man who spoke

at the meeting, was spoken of as being the moving spirit in the Armenian plot, that he was the brains of their scheme, that it was he who aroused them to rebellion. Mark you, there was no thought of rebellion ; but the Armenians were rich and prosperous, and the Turks were poor ; the Armenians were educated, the Turks ignorant ; while more than all, the Armenians were Christians, while the Turks were Moslems, fanatical Moslems.'

'But who was this man ?' asked Victor. 'That is, what was his name ?'

'He was a professor in an Armenian College,' replied the Admiral, 'the head of it, in fact, although he was a young man barely thirty years of age. His wife was but a girl, one of the most beautiful I have ever seen.'

'You saw her too, then ?

'Presently the massacres commenced, and the ghastliest horrors ever known became common. This man would have stayed and suffered with the others, but by chance he heard of the designs of the Turkish Government towards his wife. The plan was to murder their child, a boy about a year old, while the mother—'

The Admiral did not finish the sentence ; he was startled by the look on Victor's face.

'Go on ! go on !' almost shouted the lad.

'He escaped to England, bringing his wife and child with him. What they suffered during the journey to Smyrna I won't try to describe. It was too horrible. But at length they got to Southampton, the man, the woman, and the child. He told his story at the meeting, and moved the people as I have never seen people moved before. You see he was a scholar, and a gentleman, and he had a tremendous story to tell.'

Victor fixed his eyes on the Admiral's face ; but he spoke no words. He seemed incapable of speech.

'My dear wife was alive at the time,' went on the Admiral, 'and had gone with me to the meeting. When it was over she insisted on accompanying the Armenian to his lodgings, so that she might see the woman who had suffered such horrors.'

Victor's eyes burned with a still brighter light. His features became as rigid as those of a statue.

'We found her wan and frail, watching by the side of her

sleeping child, a boy a little more than a year old. Mary's heart went out to the suffering woman. She was a friend and sister to her until she died.'

'Until she died?' repeated Victor.

'Until she died. No refined, delicately nurtured woman could go through such horrors as she went through and live. She died in less than a month after we first saw her. But she died comparatively happy. She had escaped the fate for which the Turks intended her, and she was assured that her little boy should be carefully and lovingly reared. Mary left her in no doubt about that.'

Victor heaved a long trembling sigh, but no other sound escaped him. He still kept his eyes on the Admiral's face.

'Her death killed her husband,' went on the Admiral after a few seconds. 'He would have returned to Armenia again, but it was not to be. Within three months of her death he followed her.'

'Where did he die?' The question was almost like a gasp.

'In my arms. In my home. Directly after his wife's funeral, I insisted on his coming home with me. I had learnt to love him almost like a brother by this time.'

'Yes, and then?'

'He was like a man stricken from the hour of his wife's death, and the doctor soon gave up all hope of him. The only things which linked him to this world were—were the boy, and the fate of his country.'

'Of course I was the boy.'

The admiral nodded. 'I told him not to trouble about you, that I would rear you as my own. We had no children, Mary and I, and you seemed sent of God. You were a black-eyed, happy, healthy little chap, and no mother could be fonder of her firstborn than Mary was of you. Your father died peacefully. He was confident that we would rear you as our own, and he was glad to follow his wife.'

'Is that all?' He seemed to have a feeling that the story was not quite told.

'Nearly, but not quite.'

A servant entered at the moment bearing a lighted lamp, for the darkness had now come, and the Admiral went towards the

window as if to take a last look at the sea before the blinds were drawn. When they were alone again, he went on.

' He gave you your name : Victor. There is an Armenian word for this, but he liked the English name better. He seemed glad, too, that you were to be brought up as an English boy, but—but—'

' Yes, what ? ' asked Victor quickly, for the Admiral hesitated, and there was a look in his face which suggested pain.

' He told me to tell you something when I thought you were old enough to hear it.'

' What ? '

' That—that your family had lived in Armenia for hundreds of years, and had borne the most honoured name among his people, and that he hoped you would remember, always remember, that the welfare of his people had been, next to his love for his wife, the great passion of his life. That—that—'

' Yes, yes—what ? ' for again the Admiral hesitated

' That when you were born, they had prayed that you might live for and be a saviour of your race.'

For some seconds there was a silence, a silence that was painful. The Admiral's face had, in spite of its tan, become ashy pale and haggard, while Victor's eyes burned with a new light.

' Tell me his exact words,' said the boy at length.

' He said he would not lay it upon his son as a duty because it meant danger, turmoil, pain, possibly an early death. But to live for Armenia, to become instrumental in forcing the Turks to allow the Armenians to take their true place in the world, not necessarily of setting up an independent State, but being enabled to develop the genius of the race in peace and safety, was the highest destiny he could think of for his son.'

Again Victor gave a long quivering sigh.

' Now you understand,' went on the Admiral, ' why I encouraged you to learn Eastern languages, why, although a knowledge of Turkish, Arabic, and Armenian would apparently be of little use to an English boy, I gave instruction to your professors that you should have every facility for indulging in what was evidently your desire. In a way, too, I was glad when I was told that your aptitude in learning these languages was almost phenomenal, even although I was pained at the same time.'

'Why were you pained ?'

'Because I feared this hour. Because I dreaded what it might lead to. That was why I kept putting off this confession. About a year after your father's death I was ordered to Plymouth, and there the first years of your life were spent. No one knew that you were not my son, and as Mary and I watched you as you grew up to be a big, strong, black-eyed boy, we were as proud of you as if you had been really a Trencrom.'

'What is my name—that is, what was my father's name ?' asked Victor suddenly.

'Alexandropol, Ibram Alexandropol,' replied the Admiral ; 'and that reminds me. He left me documents, title deeds as we call them, of lands you own there, although they are, I am afraid, of no use to you, as all your property was confiscated by the Turkish Government. Still, I have them in safety.'

'Victor Alexandropol,' said the boy like one thinking aloud.

The Admiral sighed, he could not help feeling, in spite of what he had said, that life could never be the same to him again.

'Then I am an Armenian,' Victor went on after another silence. 'I have not a drop of English blood in my veins. I have no right to the name by which I have always been known.'

'But you are my son—always my son,' cried the Admiral. 'Never forget that. There is no need for anything to be altered. No plan need be changed.'

'Then why have you told me ?'

'Because I promised your father I would, and because it seemed right that you should know. Perhaps I have been silent too long, but when you asked me last night to advise you as to whether you should stay on at Cambridge, or accept my brother George's offer to take you into his business, I felt the time had come for you to know everything. God only knows what it has cost me to tell you, but—but you understand,' and the Admiral's voice was hoarse as he spoke.

Victor's lips trembled. He took a step forward with arms outstretched, but checked himself. Although he had Eastern blood in his veins, he had come under the influence of an English Public School and University. His heart impelled him to throw his arms around the Admiral's neck, but training caused him to adopt the British phlegmatic way of expressing his feelings.

'Dad,' he said huskily, gripping the Admiral's outstretched hand. He said nothing more, but the older man understood.

'I ought to tell you, too,' said the Admiral, 'that your father had a sister in Van. She was married to an Armenian merchant, and was at the time he came to England in comparative safety. I wrote to her at your father's request immediately after he died. Indeed, I corresponded with her for some time, but during the last few years I have not heard from her.'

But Victor did not appear to hear him. Apparently he was thinking about something else.

'You said my mother was a beautiful woman,' he said. Have you— Would you mind telling me—that is, describing them both to me ?'

'I forgot,' cried the Admiral, 'I have photographs of them, and you, taken when you were two months old. I'll get them for you.'

A minute later Victor could no longer hide his emotion. Something different from what he had ever felt before filled his being and mastered him. His eyes were riveted on what seemed to him the most beautiful face he had ever seen. It was that of a young girl scarcely more than twenty years of age. She had large, speaking, black eyes, delicately pencilled eyebrows, classical features without a touch of severity, and the whole face was crowned with a mass of black hair.

'My mother ! ' he said.

'Yes,' said the Admiral, 'and that was your father.'

But Victor took but little notice of the tall, intellectual-looking man, he seemed to have eyes for nothing save the face of the woman.

'Was—was she as beautiful as that ? ' he almost gasped.

'Even more,' said the Admiral. 'No photograph could give any idea of her. As for your father—'

He did not finish the sentence, for at that moment a servant entered bringing the evening's letters. The Admiral scanned the envelopes—at first carelessly; then he gave a start. Victor was too intent on looking at his mother's picture to notice him.

'I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me now,' said the Admiral in a changed voice. 'I—I have important things to attend to.'

Besides— Oh, yes, that's it. It's time for you to dress and be off.'

'What?'

'Of course. You promised to dine with the Tregennas to-night.'

'Victor gave a gasp of dismay. 'I had forgotten,' he said. 'I—I don't think I can go. You surely don't want me to?'

'Certainly I do. You cannot break an engagement.' He seemed anxious to get Victor out of the house.

The habit of obedience was strong on the lad. Although the Admiral had been a loving father to him, he had always insisted on immediate obedience.

'Very well, sir.'

'To-morrow we will discuss your affairs further. You will have had time to consider your whereabouts.'

He glanced at a letter which lay before him, and then went on. 'You know you had Ethel Tregenna in your mind when you—you asked me to advise you about your future.'

'Yes, I know, but—but—' He looked at the Admiral wonderingly. In spite of all that had been said, he could not understand the change in his demeanour. From being affectionate, anxious for his happiness, and eager to discuss his future, he had become abrupt, brusque, and apparently desirous of being alone.

'There, make haste, or you'll be late; the motor will be at the door in twenty minutes. You needn't come to me before you go, but—give my love to Tregenna and Ethel.'

Wonderingly Victor left the room. The revelations of the evening had bewildered him. He wanted to be alone, wanted to understand what he had heard. He entered his bedroom, and going straight to the dressing-table, stood still. There, in a silver frame, he saw the face of a young English girl with blue eyes and fair hair. A smile was on her lips and laughter in her eyes; something might have amused her as she sat for the photograph.

'I wonder what I shall say to her,' he thought. 'I wonder if it need make any difference?' and again he looked at the picture which had so moved him a few minutes before.

Half an hour later he was driving through the wintry night, heedless of the cold and the darkness. He drove the car almost

by instinct, for he had no thought of the roads along which he was passing, nor was he cognizant that he was leaving farmsteads and villages behind him. Nothing was real or tangible, everything was confused and bewildering.

When presently he had passed through a gateway leading into park-lands, and saw the lights of a house in the near distance, he slackened speed.

'I wonder if I need tell her,' he reflected, 'I wonder what she would say?'

CHAPTER II

THE WARNING SHADOWS

VICTOR looked less the typical Englishman in evening clothes than when garbed in the thick tweed knicker suit he had worn earlier in the evening. Dark-skinned, black-haired, tall and stalwart, he formed no contrast to hosts of Cornish youths when clad in tweeds ; but in evening attire, there was a suggestion of something foreign. Perhaps it was because of some trick of movement, or it might be that one seldom saw eyes as black as his among Englishmen. Thus it was that when he entered the house of Mr. John Tregenna he certainly looked different from the men who had gathered there. His step was lighter, his movements quicker.

He had evidently thrown off the influences which possessed him an hour before, for he spoke freely and naturally to the other guests. Every one seemed glad to see him, and pleasantries were heard on all hands.

' You are late, Victor,' said one, ' and several fellows have been using unparliamentary language about you. We are all as hungry as dogs, and you've delayed dinner.'

' Awfully sorry, Winkle,' he said with a laugh. ' It took me a long time to get my tie straight.'

' And it isn't straight now,' said a laughing voice beside him. I'm ashamed of you, Victor. You'll have to buy ready-made ties.'

At this there was general laughter. ' If his own father were to appear in a room with a ready-made tie, Victor wouldn't speak to him. But I say, old man, you look seedy. Anything the matter ? '

' No, I'm all right,' he replied uneasily. ' I needn't ask how you are, Ethel. As for that dress, it's a dream.'

'Winkle said it was a crime,' laughed the girl. Winkle was a nickname given to her brother.

'Winkle's head must be punched forthwith,' said a fellow called Magor. 'Will you take on the job, or shall I, Victor ?'

It was a gathering of boys and girls, who had known each other for years. Mostly they called each other by their Christian names, or by nicknames, and they had but little regard for public conventions. During vacations they had got into the habit of having informal gatherings at each other's houses, at which gatherings the elders enjoyed themselves as much as the young people. Victor had for some time looked forward to this night. For years he had thought of Ethel Tregenna as the girl he was going to marry. He had no definite idea as to when it would be, but lately, as he had noticed that Jack Magor, the son of a neighbouring squire, paid her marked attention, he felt that the time had come when he must speak. That was why he had asked Admiral Trencrom to advise him as to the future. If he followed his inclinations he would remain at Cambridge, obtain a fellowship, and devote himself to a scholastic life. But this meant that he would have to remain a comparatively poor man. On the other hand, the Admiral's brother, who was the principal partner in a prosperous shipping concern, had offered to take him into his business, an offer which meant his becoming rich.

George Trencrom, like nearly all the men of the Trencrom family, had gone to sea as a lad, but owing to an accident which had rendered him unfit for the Navy, he had thrown himself into business life, and was now at the head of a large shipping firm. His two sons had both entered the Navy, hence his willingness to take Victor into the business.

Victor had fully made up his mind to find an opportunity that night of asking Ethel to be his wife. His heart had throbbed wildly at the thought of taking Ethel, either to Cambridge or to London, and placing her at the head of his home. It would be the summit of all possible joy, the fulfilment of his life's dream.

Even the story which Admiral Trencrom had told him had not destroyed his hopes. On reflection he did not see why it should. Of course it came as a staggering blow, but, as the Admiral had said, it need not alter his future. No one need know that he was

not really the son of the Admiral, and even if the truth came out, it did not matter.

Thus he thought as he motored to Ethel Tregenna's home, and when presently he heard her voice and felt her hand in his, the thought of his Eastern parentage seemed a far-off dream.

The evening passed away amidst shouts of merriment and gay laughter. Not a cloud appeared in the lives of the happy crowd. They played games, they danced, and pleasantries abounded.

'Ethel,' said Victor, 'I want to see you alone before I go back to-night. May I ?'

'You look as serious as a judge,' replied the girl; 'is it serious ?'

'Frightfully. I—I say, Ethel——'

'Wait,' whispered the girl. 'When this game's finished I'll go into the conservatory.'

'All right,' and his heart leaped with joy. 'Don't fail me. It's awfully——'

But before he had finished the sentence the girl had fled to another part of the house.

He did not know why it was, but his heart suddenly became heavy. He felt as though there were a barrier between them. The picture of his mother, the beautiful Armenian girl, flashed before his eyes, while the memory of the man who was his father, who came to England to save his wife from death, and worse than death, came back to him.

A minute later Mr. John Tregenna, the owner of the house, came into the room:

'Heard the news ?' he asked.

'What news ?' Instantly all were at attention.

'Oh, some Government officials have at last awakened to the fact that we have spies in Cornwall.'

'Spies ! Glorious ! But what are spies doing here ? What good can they do ? Anyhow, it sounds romantic.'

'It sounds like war.' It was Jack Magor who spoke.

'War ! Impossible ! War with whom ?' But tell us the news, anyhow.'

'Of course it may be all gossip, although it seems well authenticated. It seems that the authorities have for some time had their eyes on some fellows who have been wandering around our

coast taking photographs and making plans. This afternoon things were brought to a head. They got hold of three chaps, two Germans and a Turk.'

At this there was general laughter.

' You may laugh,' said Mr. Tregenna, ' but it seems serious. The officials found that they had been working in a systematic way. They had made maps which were models of exactness and of detailed instruction. Coves were indicated where boats could land, and all sorts of instructions were written down which could only be of value to military and naval men. What is more, these documents were addressed to people in Germany and Turkey. Everything was done by skilled hands, and there were scores of suggestions that could only mean preparations for hostilities.'

' I've always said the Germans were determined on war, while our Government plays the part of an ostrich,' said Jack Magor.

' Of course, Germany wants war,' said another. ' They've been planning and preparing for it. But where does Turkey come in ? '

' Turkey is only a tool of Germany,' replied Mr. Tregenna. ' The Turkish army is officered by Germans. I was in Turkey last autumn and I know. An Armenian in Constantinople told me that German influence is paramount, and that if Germany went to war with England, as she would surely do, the Turks would join her. Germany has for years wanted Turkey as a tool.'

' But why.'

' Because it is through Turkey, and by the aid of the Turks, that the Germans could attack Egypt and our Indian Empire. This Armenian was awfully disturbed about it.'

' Why should he be ? '

' Because he believes that in such a case the Turks would try to exterminate the Armenians. He says that to a man they would be on the side of England. God help them in such case ! Of course it may be exaggerated gossip, but certainly these fellows have been arrested because of incriminating documents.'

Victor did not speak a word. His every nerve was in tension, his temples throbbed violently, his imagination was on fire. His study of Eastern languages and literature had made him ac-

quainted with Turkish history, and had given him an understanding of the Armenian position. When Admiral Trencrom had spoken to him of Armenian sufferings, he had not paid much attention, only in so far as it affected him personally ; but now a thousand thoughts flooded his brain. He felt for the first time that he was really an Armenian. In a way he was English : he had been reared as an English boy, educated in an English school and University. In that sense, he was one with the young fellows around him. But in another he was a child of the East. Although he knew it not, he felt the call of blood and of race.

Some one in an adjoining room struck up some dance music, and instantly German spies and political intrigues were forgotten by all save Victor. Something had gripped him, he knew not what. He even forgot that in all probability Ethel Tregenna was in the conservatory awaiting him. He saw faces distorted with agony, he heard voices calling for help.

Suddenly he remembered his promise to meet Ethel Tregenna, and almost instinctively he turned towards the conservatory. He had barely entered it when she came toward him.

' I have been here at least two minutes, Victor,' she said shyly, ' aren't you ashamed of yourself ? '

He saw her looking toward him. He thought her eyes were lovelit, and that they were the most beautiful eyes in the world. Then he remembered the portrait of his mother, the portrait which the Admiral had shown him that night.

' I'm so sorry, Ethel,' he stammered, ' but I must go.'

' Go ! Why, it's early, and you said—'

' Yes, I know, but—but I'm so sorry, Ethel. I'll come tomorrow—another time.'

' What's the matter, Victor ? Aren't you well ? '

' No, yes—that is, Ethel, I've heard something. Something terrible ! '

' What, dad's spy story ? Surely you don't pay any heed to that.'

He made a confused reply, and then hurried away. A few minutes later he was out in the night. Almost mechanically he drove through the park and turned up the lane in the direction of Trencrom. Had any one asked him why he was leaving in such a way he could not have told. Nothing of importance had

happened, and yet to him something revolutionizing had taken place. The whole outlook of his life was different. The incident which Mr. John Tregenna had related had, in a way he could not understand, intensified the meaning of what his foster-father had told him.

The night was pitch dark. There was no wind, and great clouds hung like a pall in the sky, but Victor drove rapidly. He knew every inch of the way, and the powerful electric lamps threw a brilliant light along the road on which he travelled. Part of his way he skirted the cliffs, and he could hear the roar of the waves as they dashed on the rocky coast.

Suddenly the lights went out. Evidently something had happened to the electric battery, and he was in utter darkness.

'This is awkward,' he thought. 'I'm four miles from home, and there isn't a place near, where I can get light. Let me see, though, I'm close to the lane which leads down to the Spanish Ladies' Cove. There's a man there who has a car, and would lend me some oil lamps. They'll be better than nothing.'

He was about to leave the car and start for the lane, when he reflected that he might, in spite of the darkness, discover what was the matter with his electric battery. He was on the point of striking a match when he hesitated. He heard the murmur of voices, evidently men's voices. Some one was coming up from the cove.

Instinctively he listened as the footsteps grew plainer. He imagined that they must be those of fishermen, although he could not understand why they should be out so late. A moment later he felt as though he were riveted to the ground.

The men had now reached the top of the lane and were close by him.

'Did you ever know such darkness. Which way do we turn?'

'To the right.'

'No, to the left.'

They spoke in German, although one had a kind of oily intonation not suggestive of the guttural Teuton.

'We must get away, anyhow. What fools Karl and Ernst were to get nabbed.'

'It's all right. They'll be able to satisfy the thick-headed British authorities, and will be free to-morrow. Their detention

would mean a row, and the British are frightened of their lives to have trouble with us. Besides, we are at peace !'

At this there was a laugh.

' Peace ! Mien Gott, but it'll not be for long. I think our work is about complete now. Meanwhile what can they do to a couple of harmless German commercial travellers, and an inoffensive ignorant Turk ? What has England to fear from a Turk, eh ? He knows nothing and cares nothing about England.'

' He'll help to make England pay for spoiling our game with the Balkan States, though.'

He also spoke German, but differently. His voice reminded Victor of a Persian whom he knew in Cambridge and whom he cordially disliked.

' Well, whatever happens to Karl and Ernst the work is done. It may hasten the day, who knows ! It must come, and we are ready. A little while from now and the Kaiser shall be master of England. Gott in Himmell, we'll pay them out when that time comes !'

They had moved out of hearing now, and were making their way along a lane which led to a hamlet in the near distance. If anything were needed to confirm Mr. John Tregenna's story the scraps of conversation which Victor had heard supplied the need. Evidently the three who had been captured did not comprise all the suspicious characters. And yet everything was unreal. The shadow of war between England and Germany which had hung so heavily in the sky a year or two before had passed away, and the nations were at peace.

Yet the incident had a meaning. Many people laughed at the idea that Germany had any thought save of living on terms of good will with the world, yet here was proof of the opposite. Besides, there was a suggestion not only of German enmity but of that of the Turks.

And the Turks had from time immemorial been the persecutors of the Armenians !

For some time Victor stood by the car motionless. Wild thoughts came into his mind of running after the men, attacking them, and haling them to justice ; but the madness of such a proceeding appealed to him. What could he do ? He was only one, and they were at least three : they might be more.

'But dad must know,' he reflected. 'He is a magistrate, and has influence with the Admiralty. Great heavens, what does it mean ?'

Again he felt as he had felt at the house of Mr. John Tregenna. He seemed to hear voices calling him. Feelings he could not describe possessed him. The call of blood and of race still appealed to him, although he knew it not.

Suddenly he remembered his car, and in a few minutes discovered what had gone wrong with the battery. Soon after shafts of light pierced the darkness of the road, and he was able to continue his journey.

As he neared Trencrom Manor, he saw that lights were still shining in the library window. As the Admiral was not in the habit of sitting up for him, he wondered at this. A fear of something entered his heart. What it was he could not tell, but he knew it was there.

He had barely put the car into the garage, when the Admiral appeared.

'That you, Victor ?'

'Yes, dad. Nothing wrong, I hope ?'

'Why should there be anything wrong ?'

'Because it's past your bed-time.'

The Admiral bolted the door, and then took hold of Victor's arm as they went into the library.

'Had a pleasant evening, my boy? I didn't expect you so soon. Have you spoken to Ethel ?'

Victor was silent.

'What's the matter ?' cried the Admiral, looking keenly into the young fellow's face. 'Anything wrong? She hasn't said "no," has she? You must take no notice of a first refusal.'

'I haven't—asked her,' stammered Victor.

'Why ?'

'I couldn't.' He threw himself into a chair, and was silent for a few seconds.

'Dad, I've had a funny experience,' he said suddenly.

'What? Saw a ghost ?'

'No, it's serious. A part of it you'd hear to-morrow, anyhow, but the other is no common property.'

Thereupon he told him of the news Mr. Tregenna had related,

and then plunged into the story of his own experience, while the Admiral listened gravely.

' Surely this will open the eyes of the pro-Germans ! ' he said when Victor had finished. ' Our Government is criminally blind—blind ! I haven't been a sailor and talked with Germans for nothing. For years they've been boasting of their navy and of their power to lick us.'

' But why should the Turks be mixed up in it ? Why should they be hand-in-glove with the Germans ? '

' Victor,' said the Admiral after a few seconds of silence, ' are you tired ? '

' Not especially. Why ? '

' I'm glad of that. I waited up because—I have something more to tell you. It—it might seem as though it were part and parcel of what you've been telling me. Great heavens, I hope it's not true ! '

' What ? '

' Listen, my boy.

CHAPTER III

THE CHOICE

'YOU noticed that the servant brought the evening letters just before you went to dress,' went on the Admiral. One of them was from your father's sister. I told you about her earlier in the evening. I saw it was from her. I recognized the handwriting, the foreign paper, the postmark. That was why I hurried you away. I did not want you to see it.'

'Why?' and Victor looked at the Admiral wonderingly.

'I don't know. I expect our conversation had unnerved me,—I had a sort of feeling that something was wrong.'

'May I see the letter?'

'Yes. Here it is.'

Victor eagerly took the letter from the envelope and read for more than a minute without remark, while the Admiral sat watching him. He wondered how it would appeal to the lad he loved so dearly.

'But, dad, I don't quite understand,' he said presently.
'Why should she be in danger?'

'Read on, and you'll see.'

'But why should she tell you this? You never saw her; she has no claim on you.'

The Admiral gave no answer to this, nor did Victor seem to expect any. His eyes were riveted on the paper before him. Presently he gave a gasp of horror. Evidently something moved him greatly.

'It's positively ghastly!' he cried when at length he reached the last page. 'Why—why—'

He turned to the commencement of the letter again, and read it through a second time. Sentences which had puzzled him before became clear to him, and the purport of the whole became more plain.

' This is from my father's sister ? '

' Yes. I told you before you went to the Tregennas' that your father had a sister who had married an Armenian merchant. I wrote to her at his request, just before he died, and we kept up a correspondence for some years. For the last three years I had not heard from her. This, as you saw, came to-night.'

Victor started to his feet, and walked to and fro in the room. That he was greatly excited was evident.

' Of course this may be the effusion of an excitable woman,' he said presently. ' After all, things can hardly be so bad as she makes out. Turkey is on the fringe of civilization, and even in Asia Minor things such as she suggests would not be allowed.'

' There may be something in that,' the Admiral admitted, ' but your father told me she was a woman of more than ordinary culture and intelligence. That letter bears it out. Besides, her late husband's position gave her special opportunities for understanding the trend of things. But that is not all. As you see, she mentions facts, ghastly facts. Her daughter is in danger, and she is powerless to protect her. Her people are powerless. The Turkish officials become more brutal every day, even while they profess kindness. It is true there have been no actual massacres as there were at the time when your father escaped to England, but robbery, persecution and outrage are not uncommon. Naturally she fears for her daughter, a young girl of nineteen. Her husband is dead, and she has no relatives.'

' But she is rich ; surely she can leave the country and live where she will.'

' It seems not. Already she has tried to leave Van, but is unable. The Turkish Governor gives her paltry excuses for preventing her. He has also made suggestions about her daughter which naturally terrify her. As you will doubtless have noticed in her letter, several wealthy Armenians have been robbed of all they possess, while horrible alternatives have been offered them about their children.'

' But, dad, how can things be so bad as she makes out, when, as she says, the Germans have such tremendous power there ? Listen to this—

" The Turkish Government seems to take all its orders from Berlin. In Constantinople German officers command the army."

German officials dictate what shall be done and shall not be done. The Young Turks are evidently subsidized by the Germans, for everything has to be referred to Germany."

'If that is so, how can the Armenians be in such danger? Germany is a civilized country, and would not allow such horrors as she suggests.'

'That ought to be so,' replied the Admiral, 'but one has to deal with facts. She says she has appealed to the German Consul, who laughed at her fears, and was indifferent to her appeal.'

'But why does she write to you? You can do nothing.'

'No, I can do nothing. She seems to have an exaggerated idea of my position, and thinks I can influence the British Government. No, as far as I can see the case is hopeless. Of course it may not be as bad as she makes out; as you say she may be an excitable, hysterical woman. All the same, she seems to be in a terrible position. She is a widow, alone in the world except for this one child. She is being robbed of her property, while the Turkish Governor has made horrible suggestions. No wonder the poor creature is nearly mad. Do you notice what she says at the close of her letter? "Oh, if I could only get to England like my brother did! I would willingly die then, for I should know that my little girl would be safe."

Victor read the letter through a third time.

'She seems to fear some great horror,' he said when he had finished. 'She says the general impression is that some fresh calamity is pending, and that there are all sorts of rumours about war. German officials are hinting that the British Empire will soon be shattered, and that the Turks will be masters of Egypt again.'

'It seems to fit in with what you heard and saw to-night, doesn't it? For years I've felt sure that Germany means to bring about a war with England. No man can have had my experiences and not be sure of it. For years I've felt certain that we were being overrun with German spies; but when I've spoken to Cabinet Ministers about it they've laughed at me. Evidently, too, spying is the order of the day in Asia Minor. This was posted in Aleppo. If she had posted it in Van, it would have been read and destroyed.'

'And she's my father's sister,' said Victor.

The Admiral was silent for some time.

' You see what she says about you,' he said. ' Evidently she wonders what you are like, and whether you are acquainted with the condition of—your people.'

Victor was silent for a few seconds, and then sighed like one weary.

' Dad, I'm going to bed,' he said.

' Yes, yes, that's right. I ought not to have spoken to you about it to-night, after—after—that is, yes, my boy, get a good rest. Good night.'

Victor was late for breakfast next morning, and when he appeared it was with pale, drawn cheeks, and dark rings around his eyes. For some time the two sat in silence, then Victor burst out suddenly—

' Dad, I've made up my mind.'

' Yes, what about?'

' My future.'

The Admiral gave a sigh which suggested relief. Evidently he had been fearing something.

' That's good. Which are you going to do—accept George's offer, or go back to Cambridge?'

' Neither.'

' Neither! What do you mean?'

' Just that, dad. I'm going to—to my own country—to Armenia.'

' But, Victor, my boy.'

' It's no use!' And the young fellow started to his feet. ' I'm mad, I expect. I haven't slept a wink for the night. I couldn't. Everything seemed upside-down. What you told me—changed things. After I left you I saw things as they really were. Yes, I know I've been brought up an England, and I had no thought but that England was my country. I was proud of it, too. I've always boasted that to be an English gentleman was to be the greatest thing in the world. But—but I'm not English. I belong to a persecuted, harried race. I'm of the East, and not of the West. All the night voices have been calling me: calling me to my own people, to fight for them, to suffer with them. Besides, think of my father's sister. I didn't realize what her letter meant till I got away alone. She's suffer-

ing the torments of hell. Even now her child, my cousin, is in danger of being outraged, made to suffer the horrors of the damned by the brutes who rule there. And I am here, here in safety, in comfort, while those of my own blood are—are Don't you see dad ?'

He was walking to and fro in the room as he spoke. His face was still pale, but his black eyes flashed fire. The Admiral realized that the young fellow he called his boy was thinking new thoughts, breathing a new atmosphere. The boy of the previous evening and the boy of this morning were not the same. A new force was at work. He had eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, and his eyes were open.

' That's it, dad, I'm off. Oh, don't think that I've forgotten all your goodness to me. I shall never forget that. And you'll always be the same to me, dad—only I must go.'

' But what are you going to do ?' was the Admiral's somewhat weak question.

' Do ! Do what my father and mother prayed I should do. Would you have me deaf to the cries that come to me from their graves ?'

' No, my boy, no ; but listen. One must take a practical view of the situation. It was only last night that you learnt—what you have learnt. You've had no time to weigh the issues carefully. You are making plans on impulse rather than on reason.'

' When the foundations of one's life are broken up, one can't regard things coldly.'

' No, that's it. My boy, you know that I love you. What it cost me to speak to you last night, God only knows. Knowing you as I did, I—I feared this. Still, try and be patient a minute. Now that you know you are not English, and that you are an Armenian, you want to help your people.'

' How can I do other ? My father brought my mother to England that she might escape a Turkish harem, a doom to which thousands of Christian girls among my own people have been—and are being dragged. My father gave his life to help his race, and their dying wish was that I should be a saviour of my people.'

The Eastern origin of the lad revealed itself. Education could not eradicate the influences of generations.

'I do not say you are not right,' was the Admiral's reply, 'but let us look at the matter calmly. How can you best help your people? If you go to the East, as you said, how can you help them? You will be without influence, without wealth, without power. You will simply share their sufferings, without being able to help them.'

'My father helped hundreds.'

'And in the end had to fly for his life. But suppose you stay in England? Suppose you adopt either of the careers we had discussed. If you go to George, you will become rich. As a rich man you can be influential, and you can use that influence on behalf of the race to which you belong. If, on the other hand, you remain at Cambridge, you can make yourself still better acquainted with their condition, you can advocate their cause through the Press, you can appeal to the British Government, and—'

'In the meantime my father's sister and my cousin remain the sport of devils,' cried the lad hotly. 'Would you have me stay here while that takes place? I couldn't, sir; I should go mad!'

'And so you will sacrifice all your prospects here, and give up Ethel, for what may be only a chimera.'

'The devil has been tempting me all the night on those lines. Do you think I haven't counted the cost? Would you have me—me sell the Christ for money, position, happiness?'

The Admiral looked at him steadily. He realized for the first time that he did not know the boy whom he had reared as his own son. There was more than a passing impulse shining in the lad's eyes; it was an overwhelming passion which possessed him.

'Don't oppose me, dad,' and his voice was hoarse. 'God knows I don't want to do this. I've been hoping you would forbid my going. I've—almost prayed that something would happen to stop me. I've called myself a madman, a fool, for thinking of such a quixotic course. But all the time the faces of my people have been haunting me; I've heard their cries. I've—I've— Oh, dad, help me!'

'I want to help you, my dear boy. I'm older than you, and am not so hot-blooded. I, too, have thought a great deal about that letter. But don't definitely make up your mind about the

future. Do not unnecessarily give up the happiness of a lifetime. Do not break existing ties. Remember you are always my son.'

'But, dad, I can't stand supinely by while my father's sister and my cousin suffer hell.'

'I don't ask you to. You know the languages of the East, you have studied Eastern conditions. Go to Van, and bring your aunt and your cousin to England—if you can.'

'Victor's eyes flashed with joy. Here was an outlet for his energies. Here was something to do. He need not break wholly with the life that was dear to him, and he could go to his own people and rescue those of his own blood.

'By this means you will be able to study first-hand the true condition of your people,' went on the Admiral, 'and learn whether anything practical can be done.'

'And when can I go?'

'As soon as arrangements can be made.'

Long and anxiously they talked, until matters took a definite shape, and a few days later it was discussed among Victor's friends that he was taking a journey to the East.

'But why are you going, Victor?' asked Ethel Tregenna, who seemed greatly disappointed.

'My father doesn't wish that discussed just now,' replied Victor, 'that is why I must not tell—even you.'

'How long will you be away?'

'I don't know quite—but I say, Ethel.'

'Yes?' queried Ethel almost eagerly.

'I hardly know how to say it, but I say, you know how gone on you I am. Why, I'd—that's why it's so jolly hard. But, Ethel, I shall never care for another girl, mind that. I say—you're crying. Do you care?'

'Of course I—I care.'

'I don't ask you to wait for me,' said Victor, who looked at her some seconds in silence, 'it—it wouldn't be fair; but—but I shall go on loving you all the time. If it were only fair I'd ask you to wait for me.'

'Why wouldn't it be fair?' she asked, looking at him shyly.

The Admiral accompanied Victor to London, and spent a few

days with him there. He went to Government offices and obtained letters of introduction to influential people in various Eastern cities. He also had lengthy conversation with people in London concerning the condition of the Armenians in Asia Minor. Whether he did more harm than good by these conversations will appear later, but he was anxious that Victor should go to the East with the best possible credentials, and spared no pains to obtain them.

When he returned to Cornwall he learnt that nothing could be known concerning what had happened to the supposed spies who had been found with incriminating documents on them, and many grumbled that the affair was hushed up by Government officials who were playing into the hands of Germany.

It was on a murky February day that Victor left London. A low-lying frosty fog made everything bitterly cold, and the passengers on the boat train to Dover expressed the hope that it would be warmer in France.

'I don't expect it will be, though,' said an Englishman whose nationality was writ large on his every word and movement. 'I always say that France, in spite of all their talk, has a worse climate than England. In the East, now, there *is* a climate worth talking about. I wish I were going there.'

'You are right, sir,' said a man who was as evidently a foreigner as the other was English. 'In the East it is glorious. But ah, it is in England that men make money.'

'You come from the East?'

'Yes, the Near East. I am a Greek.'

'I took you for a Turk,' said the Englishman.

'God forbid. I was born in Athens. I was at Constantinople once, but only once. I will never put my foot on the land of the Turks again.'

'But you Greeks have to do business with the Turks. You know their language, I expect?'

'Not a word. No, all my business is with the English and the French. But for the dreary winters of England, I should live there. I shall be back again in a week. I am only going as far as Paris.'

They were in a Pulman car, for the Admiral had insisted on

Victor travelling in comfort. From where he sat he could see the faces of the other two, although he himself was partly hidden.

'He looks more like a Turk than a Greek in spite of his English clothes,' he reflected as he took a second look at the man. 'He's an unpleasant-looking rascal, anyhow,' and then he thought no more about him.

He did not stay in Paris, but caught the express for Marseilles, where he caught a P. and O. steamer for Port Said. At first he had intended to get to Armenia by way of Constantinople, where he could get a boat along the Black Sea to Trebizond; but some one in London had persuaded the Admiral that the best route was to go to Port Said by a P. and O. and there take a Coast steamer for Beirut.

'From Beirut,' said the Admiral's informant, 'there is a railway to Aleppo, and from Aleppo there are facilities for getting to all parts of Asia Minor.'

This then was the route that Victor decided to take, and when he reached Port Said he felt that he had really begun his journey.

He felt strangely happy, he hardly knew why. The town itself was dirty in the extreme, and in spite of the interest which everywhere abounded, it struck him as ugly beyond words. The harbour was ugly, the houses were in the main ill-built and shabby, while the people were as mixed a crowd as can be found in any town in the world, and yet he could have shouted for joy. Perhaps it was partly because of the warmth of the sun and the blueness of the sky; but there was something deeper than this.

'East is East, and West is West,'

he heard himself quoting, and then he laughed at himself for his excitement.

He stayed at Port Said only a few hours. When night came, he found himself on a boat bound for Beirut. The next day he passed by Jaffa, and looked long and wonderingly on the historical coast village, behind which he could see the green and gold of the orange groves. In due time he reached Beirut, and was strongly tempted to stop there for a time so that he could go to Damascus, but learning that a train was starting almost immediately for Aleppo he boarded it. He felt he must not waste time. He was nearing the country of his own people, and he wondered as he

watched the faces of the men who thronged the station whether they could be guilty of the deeds described in the letter which led him to take this journey.

Just as the train was leaving the station, he saw two Turkish officials, accompanied by a man in European attire. They were gesticulating wildly and talking loudly. Victor knew that they were speaking Turkish, but what they said it was impossible, amidst the din and clamour, to tell.

As they passed the carriage where he was, however, he heard a few words plainly.

'He is here! Stop the train, I tell you.' It was the man dressed as a European who spoke.'

'Impossible, I tell you. We have no——,' and the last word was lost in the shriek of the engine.

'I have seen that man's face before,' reflected Victor; 'I seem to have seen it several times on the journey. Where, I wonder?'

Hour after hour the train crawled on. There were stoppages innumerable, and no one seemed to have any care that they were hours late. More than once a Turkish official boarded the train and examined his passport; but no remarks were passed, although he felt sure he was an object of suspicion.

After many hours' journey, the train crawled into Aleppo. It was late at night, and the darkness was so dense that he could form no idea of the town. Even the station itself was so dark that he could scarcely see which way to turn. More than once he had to struggle with men who tried to seize his luggage and drag him willy-nilly to ramshackle conveyances which purported to belong to the best hotel in the town.

At length he found the bus belonging to the *Oriental*, where he had been advised to stay, and ere long arrived at a building which, as far as he could judge, faced a square.

'Yes, monsieur,' said the proprietor in French, 'dinner is on the table. Doubtless monsieur is tired and hungry. No. 13 is monsieur's room. His luggage shall be taken there at once.'

Victor ate his food in silence. Two other travellers who had come by the same train sat near him, but neither took any notice of him. It was almost impossible to see their faces, so dimly was the room lit.

He was on the point of asking to be shown to his room, when

two men entered talking in an excited manner with the proprietor.

'Will you tell some one to show me where I am to sleep,' said Victor.

'Not yet, if you please.'

It was a man in uniform who spoke.

'Perhaps,' he continued, 'it is all a mistake, and perhaps monsieur can explain, but he will please come with us.'

He smiled as he spoke, and shrugged his shoulders ingratiatingly.

'Come with you ! Where ?' asked Victor.

'I will provide monsieur a place to sleep to-night,' he said.

'Oh, a very pleasant and good place ; then no doubt monsieur will be able to answer the Governor some questions in the morning.'

'Of course I refuse to go with you,' cried Victor hotly.

'Oh, then I am afraid monsieur will be inconvenienced.'

He went to the door, blew a whistle, and in a few seconds three men, who were evidently policemen, entered.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAGIC OF A NAME

FOR a moment Victor was bewildered by what was taking place. Everything had happened so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that he scarcely realized the purport of it all. He was angry at what he regarded as an outrage. Reared as he had been in England, and bred to the usages of civilization and freedom, the thought of officials, without warning and without reason, entering his hotel and treating him like a criminal, almost caused him to lose his self-control.

But not altogether. Child of the East though he might be, the associations of a lifetime had their influence. An English Public School boy does not easily lose his head, and however angry he may feel he does not generally show it. A moment's reflection convinced him that he must not play into the hands of these fellows.

Two thoughts flashed into his mind as the Turkish police entered the room. One was that there was some plot to hinder him from reaching his destination. The other was that a mistake had taken place, and he was suspected of something of which another man was guilty. The first seemed to be far-fetched and improbable, but it had to be borne in mind. He had come to the East because of a letter from the Van, that letter had been conveyed by a friend to Aleppo, because the Turkish authorities would have read and destroyed it if posted in Van. He had come, too, to try to rescue a victim of Turkish cruelty.

But how could that be known? He had discussed his mission with no one since he left England. He was supposed to be a well-to-do young Englishman who had come to the East for pleasure. But Admiral Trencrom had obtained letters of intro-

duction for him, and might in so doing have let fall words which suggested his purpose. The Admiral had told him with some anger that as far as he could see there were people in Government offices who were certainly not English. Might there not be underground influences at work ?

But the thought seemed so far-fetched that he would have discarded it at once had not a sudden memory flashed into his mind. When leaving Beirut, two officials accompanied by a civilian had hurriedly come to the train, and the civilian had shouted, ' He is here ! He is here ! ' He remembered then that the man's face seemed familiar to him, that he fancied he had seen it more than once during his journey. Now he knew where he had seen it. It was the face of the man who had got into the train at Charing Cross, and who had told his travelling companion that he was a Greek, and that he did not know a word of Turkish.

Yet he had seen him at Beirut and had heard him speaking Turkish !

The mind works rapidly under stress of circumstances, and although it has taken me some time to describe Victor's reflections, they flashed through his mind like a beam of light.

' Of course, monsieur will inform me the reason for this outrage,' he said quietly in French, for it was in this language the Turks had spoken.

After this there was a long altercation. The chief of the Turks was very obsequious, very apologetic, and expressed great sorrow at the inconvenience he was putting the visitor to their city, but insisted on his going with him. Victor showed his passport, but to no effect ; he threatened the anger of the British Foreign Secretary, without avail. At length, when all hope seemed gone, he bethought him of a letter he had brought from Admiral Tren-crom addressed to an old friend of his named John Penwithen.

The effect of the mention of John Penwithen's name was instantaneous and almost overwhelming.

' Is Howajja Penwithen a friend of yours ? ' he asked, and his voice was changed.

' He is a friend of my father's,' replied Victor. ' I did not mean to trouble him to-night, but now I demand that he be sent for immediately.'

'There is no need, excellency,' cried the Turk. 'Evidently a mistake has been made. May happy dreams come to your excellency through the night. Doubtless when I call in the morning, I shall be favoured with the opportunity of offering full explanations? I will not be later than ten o'clock.'

He spread his hands ingratiantly as he spoke, and bowed low; but Victor saw that his eyes glistened like the eyes of a snake, while his face had anything but a pleasant look.

'Take good care of your guest, Abdul, and see that no harm comes to him,' he said to the hotel proprietor.

'I will take every care of him. I will treat him like a prince,' was the man's reply.

One of Achma el Amed's companions opened the door, and they moved into the vestibule. Instantly there was an altercation.

'I have not finished with him yet,' Victor heard Achma say in Turkish. 'He flouted me; did you see? By Allah, I will learn much before the morning.'

Some one made a reply, the purport of which Victor could not make out, but Achma broke out angrily.

'I tell you I'm not sure yet. Ahmet does not speak lightly. And if he's an Armenian, let him look out.'

Victor gave no sign that he understood. Evidently no one had any idea that he knew the language, and he made a mental resolve not to betray the fact. He felt that he was on dangerous ground, that influences were at work of which he had no knowledge, and that it might be useful to him to have it thought that he was ignorant of their language.

The Turks still altercated as they passed down the street, but no words could be distinguished. It was very evident that Achma el Amed was angry.

'I suppose I can go to bed now?' said Victor with a yawn. He did not feel at all sleepy, but he thought it best to impress Monsieur Abdul that he was perfectly at ease.

'I will show monsieur to his room at once. I am distressed beyond words; but monsieur will understand. Mistakes do happen. Besides, doubtless he has heard how matters stand?'

'How what stands? I do not understand.'

They suspect monsieur of being an Armenian, and Armenians

are not popular. Oh, no,' and the Turk spread his hands, ' there is no rebellion and no massacres, but they are not loved. They live in the best houses, and they are rich. Some say they plan treason. But howajja is tired. He will want to go to bed. I will show him his room.'

Victor sat a long time alone reflecting on what had taken place. Presently he took some letters from his pocket and read them carefully. 'I'd better be careful about showing some of these,' he thought. 'Anyhow, it is great fun, and at one time things looked exciting. I fancy I shall have some curious experiences before I'm through with this job.'

The following morning Victor woke with a start. Strange cries reached him. Noises with which he was altogether unfamiliar came through his window.

Jumping out of bed he looked from the window into a square outside. A medley of people had gathered, every one of whom seemed to be trying to shout louder than the other. All sorts of animals filled the space : donkeys, mules, horses, camels. Booths had already been set up, and bargaining had begun.

Every particle of the young fellow's body tingled. Sensations hitherto unknown possessed him. All was strange, and yet nothing was strange. He had heard these voices before, and had seen many such scenes. Where, he did not know ; but he was sure he had.

It was barely daylight, and the air was keen and cold ; but he did not feel it. He was fascinated by the many coloured garments of the people, by the expressions of their faces, by their loud cries.

Then suddenly there was silence save for one clear cry, echoed by distant ones. On the other side of the market-place was a mosque, and on the top of the minaret a man stood. In a piercing mournful voice he told the people that Allah was the only God, and that Mohammed was His prophet. 'Come to prayer ! Come to prayer !' he shrieked, and as his voice was echoed by other voices over the town, he saw men leave their merchandise and their cattle and throng into the mosque. He saw, too, that some of them gave savage looks at those who remained at their stalls and did not respond to the call.

Victor went back to bed in a very thoughtful mood. He understood those looks. Those who went into the mosque to pray

were faithful Moslems ; while those who stayed outside were probably his own people.

No sleep came to him after that. His mind was full of the mission on which he had come. Every nerve tingled at the thought of it. There was excitement, mystery, romance in the thought of it. He would see strange sights, visit strange places, and meet with strange people. But more : he would be with his own kin, he would meet his own flesh and blood. Then he remembered the look on Achma el Amed's face, as he had mentioned the word 'Armenian.' It was impossible not to recognize the hatred in it. And he was an Armenian come to rescue his father's sister and his cousin. For a moment a feeling like fear came into his heart. The events of the previous night came back to him, and he tried to understand.

Before long he heard a stealthy knock at the door, and a youth about twenty years of age entered. He had a pleasant face, teeth which shone like ivory, and eyes that flashed.

He spoke something in Turkish, but Victor's face gave no sign of understanding. Then the lad spoke in English.

'Arise ! Get up !' he said.

'Why ? Is it breakfast time ?'

The young Turk looked around, and then approached nearer Victor's bed.

'Some one to see master,' he said mysteriously.

'Where ?'

'Outside. May he come in ? Tihib, Mush Tihib. Let him come in.'

'Yes, let whoever it is come in,' he said, putting his hand on the letters which he had placed in the pockets of his night suit. He did not know why he said this, except that the impulse was strong upon him.

A second later his visitor appeared.

CHAPTER V

JOHN PENWITHEN'S ADVICE

VICTOR lifted his head and saw a well-groomed man in European attire, about fifty-five years old. He had a plentiful crop of black hair which was growing grey over the temples, dark grey eyes, rugged features, a square chin, and a pleasant smile. Everything about him suggested strength. He was tall and strongly built, his large ungloved hands looked strong and capable, his broad shoulders and upright form gave the impression of great muscular power. Neither did his strength cease with his physical proportions. His well-shaped head, his firmly-set lips and quiet eyes denoted a strong personality, an indomitable will.

When Charles Darwin asked Huxley what he thought of Gladstone, the latter replied that he was a man who would make the world hear of him, if he were sent out on Salisbury Plain with only one garment on his back.

Mr. John Penwithen was not great in that sense, but he was a man who was bound to impress his personality wherever he went.

' You are young Victor Trenckrom, son of my old friend Bob Trenckrom ? ' said the newcomer to Victor. ' Forgive my calling in this unceremonious way, but I thought I'd better.'

' You are Mr. Penwithen, then ? '

' That is so. I can't say I'm glad to see you here.'

' I have a letter for you, if you'll kindly read it.'

' Presently, with pleasure ; but not now. Abdul Hoja your host sent the lad who brought me here, to my house a few minutes ago. He told me what happened to you last night. I know Achma el Amed very well, and when I heard what he said to you, I thought I'd come along. Achma el Amed, is from the point of influence, the second man in Aleppo, and has considerable power around here. For that matter his name is known in Diar-

bekir, in Van, in Erzerum, and in—Constantinople. As a consequence he's a dangerous man to have as an enemy. You see I come straight to my business.'

'But I don't understand, Mr. Penwithen. It's awfully good of you to come to me like this, and I can't tell you how grateful I am; but really I know of no reason why he should come to me as he did.'

'Did he tell you he'd call and see you this morning?'

'Yes, ten o'clock I think he said.'

'That'll mean nine in this case. It's just after eight now. I got a letter from your father a few days ago, saying you'd be in Aleppo, and asking me to give you any help you might need. You recognize the handwriting, I dare say?'

Victor looked eagerly at the envelope, and gave a sigh of relief. His visitor's entrance had been so sudden, and he had commenced talking so suddenly about his affairs that he felt uncomfortable. The letter reassured him.

'Perhaps you'd like to give your version of the—the interview?'

Victor in a few words told him what had taken place.

Mr. John Penwithen was silent for a few seconds. 'Mister Achma is a keen man,' he said. 'He possesses what you would call in England Oriental subtlety. The English people do not understand the Turk; no one does who has not lived with him and rubbed shoulders with him for many years. If you ask me, I should say that he has not acted without reason, and I imagine he is very angry that you made him look rather foolish last night.'

'But why should he come to me at all?'

'Can you not think?'

'I really can see no explanation of his action. I come here as an English traveller. Hundreds of other people travel in Asia Minor for pleasure, for business, or out of curiosity. Why shouldn't I?'

'Look here, this is no time for beating about the bush, and I tell you frankly, to use our English slang, Achma has evidently got his knife into you. He didn't get on very well last night because your passport was regular and because—you mentioned my name. As it happens, Achma doesn't want to offend me.

But he seldom acts without reason. He has heard of something, something which seems important. He knows, or thinks he knows, more about you than appears on the surface. As a consequence the affair of last night is only a preliminary canter.'

Mr. John Penwithen stroked his chin thoughtfully.

'Where are you going?' he asked suddenly.

'I mean to go to Van.'

'If it's not impertinence—why?'

'That's a rather long story, and I'd rather tell you in your own house, where there is no possibility of listeners.'

The older man looked at Victor with an expression on his face which suggested a mixture of admiration and doubt.

'That settles it,' was all he said.

'Settles what?'

'Settles the fact that Achma has got hold of something.'

'But what? No one but—but my father knows why I am here. I have not told a single person. My passport is regular, and I am a British subject.'

'Are you sure your father has told no one? Even his letter to me led me to expect something, and if he aroused my curiosity, what may he have done among others? By the way, he told me he was securing letters of introduction to various people in the East. Did he visit Government offices in order to do so?'

'I believe he did.'

Again John Penwithen rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

'Just so. Look here, Victor, I've known your father off and on for a good many years. I've also known the Turk and his ways for a long time. I was British Consul in Constantinople, where I met your father more than once, and although my position in Aleppo cannot be easily defined, I have been in a position to learn many things.'

He had scarcely ceased speaking when the boy again appeared.

'Howajja Achma el Amed come to speak to the English gentleman,' he said.

'Good,' said Mr. Penwithen. 'You take your time to get into your clothes. I'll speak to Achma. By the way, have you plenty of money?'

'I was given a liberal allowance on starting,' said Victor.

'Why?'

'Oh, nothing, except that Achma is a miser and, like every Turk, loves backsheesh.'

'Backsheesh! One cannot give presents to a man in his position.'

John Penwithen laughed. 'There is not a Turk from the Sultan downward who will not take them,' he said. 'It is only a matter of degree, and the way you give them. And mind, be very gracious to Achma. Flatter him, tell him what a great man he is, make him feel that he is honouring you by paying you so much attention.'

When Victor came downstairs he found that Achma was all smiles. He apologized most profusely for what had taken place the previous night, and all the time he shyly let fall questions, the answer to which might betray Victor's thoughts.

'Of course such mistakes will happen,' assented Mr. Penwithen, and Howajja el Amed's position is so responsible that he is obliged to be careful. But I've explained everything. I've convinced him that you know nothing of politics, that your father, a high British official, is very friendly towards the Turkish Empire, and that you are simply a young man of leisure who is curious to see the East.'

'Ah, yes, of course, of course,' smiled Achma, while his eyes glittered curiously. 'I have been misinformed, and I am deeply grieved. Nothing can be more satisfactory than Monsieur Penwithen's explanation. No, no, I would not think of troubling you to go to the Governor; he will, of course, take my word, and I place myself at Monsieur Trenckom's entire disposal to facilitate his travels in our country. Where did you say you wish to go, monsieur?'

'Good, good,' said John Penwithen, before Victor had time to reply, 'and now that is settled, what do you say about breakfast? When I heard of your little difficulty, I hurried off without a bite. What would you? Did I not go to school with your father? Is he not one of my oldest friends? And by the way, Victor, I do not suppose his excellency has breakfasted, and I'm sure you would be delighted for him to join us.'

An hour later breakfast was over. During the whole time the Turk was apologetic, mysterious, watchful. He exerted himself to be pleasant, he praised everything English, he ate enormously.

He laughed at the feeblest jokes, he invited Victor to accompany him around the town, he pretended to be confidential and apologized for his freedom of speech, but was always as secretive as an oyster. More than once Victor tried to lead him to speak on Turkish affairs, but always in vain.

'Ah, what would you?' he laughed. 'I live in a jug, inside that jug I know everything, but outside!—I am as blind as a bat. But I do my duty, I live in Aleppo, all my duties and interests are here.'

Once Victor tried to introduce the question of the Armenians, but only once. The very name brought a look on the Turk's face which spoke of danger.

But they parted on terms of apparent friendship. It was understood that before Victor left Aleppo he was to dine with him at Mr. John Penwithen's house, an honour which made the Turk's eyes glitter more than ever, but Victor felt all the time that he was suspicious, watchful, angry.

That same afternoon Victor sat alone in Mr. John Penwithen's residence, a big house situated on the outskirts of Aleppo. Close by was another large residence, the property of Herr Ernst Brandt, who was also a merchant in the city, and who had dealings with many people.

'Yes, we are quite alone here,' said Mr. Penwithen. 'No one lives in the house except my two sisters and the servants. I am a bachelor, and have no need for a big house like this, but I like room—yes, I like room.'

Victor plunged at once into his story, and told his father's old friend what I have already related. Mr. Penwithen listened attentively, scarcely speaking the whole time. That he was deeply interested, however, was easy to be seen, and when Victor had finished his narrative he asked several keen searching questions.

'And that is all?'

'Yes, that is all.'

'Do you want my advice?'

'Yes,' said Victor, after hesitating a second.

'It is quickly given. Leave the country at once. Take the first train to Beirut, and then catch the first boat for—anywhere you like, as long as it is not in Turkey. Give up this scheme.'

'But why?'

'Because you will never succeed. You will never take that woman and her daughter to England. I doubt if you would ever reach Van, even if you started for it with the strongest possible escort. Don't go a step farther than you've gone. Go back to England, and settle down there as my old friend Trenckrom evidently wants you to.'

'But—but—'

'Give it up, I tell you, give it up. Don't mix yourself up in this Armenian business, and don't try to go to Van. It would be madness, and worse than madness, to try and carry out your plans. If you do you will never see England again.'

'But tell me why.'

'Yes, I'll tell you why.'

CHAPTER VI

FROM ALEPO TO TREBIZOND

BUT in spite of his promise, Mr. John Penwithen hesitated. His strong rugged face was set and stern, and his eyes were almost menacing.

' You distinguished yourself at Cambridge,' he said, ' at least, I am told you did.'

' Only in certain things,' was Victor's quick reply.

' But in Eastern languages and literature. Your progress in the study of all that appertained to Eastern affairs was said to be phenomenal. Did you not also make it known that you intended to go in for the Diplomatic Service, and use whatever powers you might obtain for the betterment of Christians in the East ? '

' It was only a passing fancy. I remember there was a discussion at the Union on Eastern Atrocities, and I—'

' Exactly. Look here, Victor, you have been a marked man for years.'

' Is I a marked man ? '

' Yes, you. It was wondered why you made a speciality of such subjects, and immediately you were watched. Inquiries were made about you, your parentage was discussed. It has been known in certain quarters for years that you are not Admiral Trenckom's son. It seems impossible, doesn't it ? But England is riddled with spies, my lad. There is no phase of our life, no one who may possibly be important in the life of our nation, but who is watched and studied. It was imagined for a time that the Admiral intended you for the Diplomatic Service, and that is why you received special attention.'

' But how did you learn this ? '

' I have had a long talk with Achma el Amed to-day. He has

been warned against you. He has also been told that you are an Armenian by birth, and that your presence in this country is dangerous. By some means your purpose has leaked out, and although I was able to keep him from taking further action against you here in Aleppo, I wouldn't give a row of pins for your life if you proceed farther.'

'But how could my purpose leak out ?'

'Ask me another. I only tell you it is a fact. As I said this morning, your father—that is, the Admiral—may have dropped some hint in London, that hint found its way to German ears, and the rest followed as a natural sequence.'

'But what has any German to do with it ?'

John Penwithen laughed. 'Everything, my boy, everything. As I told you, Germany rules Turkey, and Germany means to possess everything Turkey has. The little trade done in Asia Minor is mainly in the hands of the Armenians, and the Germans mean to have it. I tell you,' and the Cornishman rose to his feet, 'Turkey is on a powder magazine, so is Europe for that matter. War is inevitable.'

'You can't be serious ?'

'I'm more than serious ; I'm certain. What countries will be dragged into it, I don't know ; but it's the common talk among Turkish officials that Germany is going to force war, and that the Turks will join Germany in order to get back the Balkan States and Egypt. Of course the Turks *think* they will get a good bargain out of the Germans, and the Germans *know* that they are going to use Turkey as a cat's paw. But that, although distantly connected with it, is not exactly the point now. You must get out of the country, and get out quickly. You must give up your quixotic plans, for your life will not be worth a bishlek if you don't.'

'Why ?'

'Don't you see ? They already suspect you. They have set their machinery at work. Suppose you persist in trying to get to Van, what will happen ? Suppose you go as far as Nisibin by train, and that is as far as the Bagdad Railway is completed, you will then have nearly two hundred miles of wild mountainous country to traverse. That country is practically away from civilization. Men's lives are held as cheaply as dirt. There

are no means of travel except by horses or mules. There are practically no roads. Now then, don't you see ?'

Victor was silent.

'I know what you are thinking,' went on John Penwithen. ' You are saying to yourself that I am an alarmist. That if the country is in the hands of the Germans, there will be German Consuls in every town, and that, as a consequence, even Armenians will be safe. As for British subjects, they will be respected as they are respected in every civilized country.'

' And is not that so ? '

' Remember first of all that you are an Armenian, remember, too, that it is one of the German plans to drive every Armenian out of Asia Minor, and that by fair means or foul this will be done. Remember, too, that you are the son of Ibram Alexandropol, whose name to every Turk is like a red rag to a bull.'

' But I have an English passport. Admiral Trencrom, in filling up the necessary papers, gave my name as Trencrom.'

' Yes, and here the English are hated. Oh, I know it does not always appear on the surface ; but it is so. The Germans have done their work well. In England the Germans are your friends, they are welcomed into your homes, and they profess all sorts of kind things about you. But remember every German is your secret enemy. Here the mask is taken off. They do not hide the fact that they hate England, and that they mean to crush her. And Germany rules Turkey. Who provided the money by which the railway on which you travelled yesterday was built ? The Germans. Who is subsidizing the Turks every day ? The Germans. Who is drilling Turkish soldiers, reconstructing her army, her navy ? The Germans. Why ? There can be a great future for Asia Minor, but it needs industry, brains, enterprise. Who owns the wealth of Asia Minor now ? In spite of repeated massacres and persecutors, the Armenians. Therefore the Armenians will be destroyed. I'm not guessing now, I know.'

' You mean to say that the Germans mean to destroy all Armenians in Asia Minor ? '

' I mean to say that I *know it*. Yes, I'm talking seriously. Even at this moment plans are being made. What they are I don't know. Of course the Germans will not appear in all this, they will pretend to be powerless. But it will be done. That

is why Asia Minor is a volcano, and that is why, if you try to carry out your ideas, you'll be as dead as mutton in a week.'

'If you know of these things, why don't you make them known? Why don't you make representation to the British Government?'

'Because, for one thing, I can't prove them, and for another, even if I could, nothing would be done. If England tried to do anything, it would mean war with Germany, and that is what British statesmen are trying to avoid; but if they only knew!'

'All the more reason for trying to save my father's sister and her daughter,' said Victor after a pause.

'What! You mean to say you are going to persist in your madness?'

'What would you have me do?'

'Go home, my lad—or go to Switzerland, to Italy—anywhere; but for Heaven's sake get out of Turkey.'

'And if I did I should be ashamed of myself. I should always know that through cowardice, through a paltry fear for my own safety, or life, I allowed my own flesh and blood to be sacrificed. No, as God is my helper, I'll do it. I started out to reach Van, to rescue my own flesh and blood and to help my people, and I'll do it.'

There was no suggestion of boastfulness in these words as Victor spoke them. His voice was restrained, and his eyes burned with a steady light.

'But for what you have told me, I should believe you were really a Trencrom,' said John Penwithen, and his tones suggested admiration.

'I never dreamed until two months ago that Admiral Trencrom was not my father,' replied Victor. 'I shall always love him as though he were. He is my ideal of what a gentleman should be; and I could not conceive him giving up what he believed to be his duty because of danger, or because what he aimed to do seemed impossible. Why, I should be ashamed to look him in the eyes if—if I did what you suggest!'

'Then you are determined to go to Van and—and—all the rest of it?'

'I'm going to have a shot at it,' and there was a suggestion of the British schoolboy in the way he spoke.

'Then, remember you have Turks to deal with. Don't go bull-headed into this thing. Take a round-about course. Throw dust in their eyes.'

Victor looked at him questioningly.

'Let me deal with Achma el Amed, and together we will upset his plans. You must leave here at once. You must go to Smyrna.'

'To Smyrna?'

'To Smyrna. It must seem to them that you've abandoned the idea of going to Van. But from Smyrna you can take a boat for the Dardanelles, for Constantinople. From there you can go along the Black Sea to Trebizon, and from there you must travel, almost due south to Erzerum and Van.'

'I see! Yes, I see!'

'Mind, I wouldn't stake a sixpence on your success, but as you are determined, that seems your best course. Come back from the window—quick!'

Mr. Penwithen almost pulled Victor into the room as he spoke.

'Didn't you see?'

'I saw Achma el Amed talking with a man.'

'That man is Herr Brandt. He is a German who poses as a merchant. In reality he is a great many other things. I don't want him to see you. I shouldn't be surprised if he has not a great deal to do with Achma's visit to you last night. I invited Herr Brandt and Achma to meet you here at dinner to-morrow night, but—let me see,' and John Penwithen took a book from the table.

'In two hours it will be dark,' he went on, 'and by that time you must be ready to leave Aleppo.'

'All right, sir,' said Victor promptly.

'I'll explain everything to El Hoja. He finds it pays him to serve me and to keep his mouth closed. By the way, Yusef, that boy who brought me to your room, is an Armenian. He would make you a good faithful servant. He is the son of some Armenians who were massacred in 1896, and was brought up as a Moslem. In reality, however, he's a Christian. Now then, go back to your hotel, and tell your host Mister el Hoja that I'll be soon with him. Do you understand?'

'I think so.'

'Very good, now listen.'

After this Mr. John Penwithen talked several minutes very earnestly, while Victor listened very quietly.

Several days later Victor arrived in Constantinople and was received in an hotel there as a Turk. This he was able to do without difficulty. His knowledge of Turkish was evident, his skin was tanned with the sun ; he wore a fez, his clothes were cut Turkish fashion. Yusef his servant had primed him in many things of which he was ignorant, and Yusef had evidently conceived a strong affection for his new master. Victor little realized what he would owe Yusef before many months were over.

They stayed in Constantinople several days, during which time Victor made himself acquainted with the capital of the Turkish Empire. He visited the great Mosque, the places of entertainment, and saw the sights of the great city. He also found his way into the restaurants and heard the talk of the people. He also became acquainted with a prominent member of the Young Turkish party, and learnt much. But he was very non-committal as to his own views. He moved around the city with great freedom, and evidently no one suspected him of being reared in England.

He found that John Penwithen was right in regard to his diagnosis of Turkish affairs. On every hand Germans were in evidence. They stayed at the best hotels, they lived in the best houses, they occupied the principal Government positions. But more than that : he discovered that the Germans had fostered a feeling of intense hatred towards England. In the places of amusement all abuse of England was cheered, every prophecy that England would soon be degraded and ruined, applauded.

As soon as it was possible he left Constantinople for Trebizond, but it was not until May that he saw from the deck of his vessel the shining minarets and white flat-roofed houses of the town which lies on the southern shores of the Black Sea.

CHAPTER VII

THROUGH ARMENIA

NO sooner did Victor land in Trebizond than he felt that he was really in the East. During his journey from Beirut to Aleppo, and even while he was staying in Constantinople, the mystery and romance of the Orient did not really grip him. In these places the East mingled with the West, and while they were utterly different from the scenes amongst which he was reared, Western life and Western civilization were felt.

But no sooner did he land at Trebizond than the West seemed to fade into obscurity. The old life at Trenckrom was like a dream, and even Ethel Tregenna seemed shadowy. Not that he had ceased to care for her—the romance of his boyhood still remained—but she was in the background of his life, rather than one who filled the whole horizon. For the first time, the real mystery of the East appealed to him ; the blue sky overhead, the minarets which everywhere abounded, the cries of the people, and the vegetation peculiar to this harbour on the Black Sea, somehow created an atmosphere different from anything he had ever known before.

And he was a part of it all. He was of the East, he was in the country where his forbears had dwelt through long generations.

While he was in Aleppo talking with Mr. John Penwithen, he could not help agreeing that the Cornishman's description of his mission was true. It was sheer madness. But now it seemed natural enough ; what had seemed madness was coloured by the glamour of romance. Nothing was too strange to happen in this land of dreams, where the mountains lifted their rugged peaks into an azure sky.

'We are in for great things, Yusef,' he laughed, 'nothing will

be impossible in this country.' And Yusef, catching his master's spirit, laughed with him.

Victor was only a boy, but according to our prosy Western ideas had set out upon an enterprise which was foolish in the extreme. But he felt nothing of this foolishness. All the romance of his nature was aroused, and the call of the blood was strong and insistent.

Victor revelled in Trebizond. To him it was a city of dreams, of mystery, and it appealed to his vivid imagination as nothing had ever appealed before.

'Our people were great here once,' Victor said to Yusef, as he stood on the high plateau on which the city was built—'what if they should become great again? What if we should own all this as our own country, and live as a free people in a free land? That was my father's great desire.'

And then, boylike, he found himself fancying himself as a leader among his people.

He was greatly impressed by the great church of Hagia Sofia, or the Divine Wisdom. Hundreds of years before it had been built by the Greeks, and was a Christian Church; but in the course of centuries, as the Mohammedans had swept over the country like a devastating flood, they had converted it into a mosque, while the Christians had either been driven from the land or murdered.

As he looked, his mind swept back over the centuries, and he saw those of his own race struggling for life and liberty, even as they were struggling to-day. He could not help being proud of his people, especially as he realized how superior they were to the Turks. In the Turkish quarters was squalor, dirt, degradation; but where the Christians lived there were busy thoroughfares, well-stocked shops, and every sign of a busy and prosperous life. The Moslem had only laid his hand on the country to degrade and ruin it.

Little did Victor think, as he looked on the white city glistening in the sunlight, that the eyes of the world would soon be fixed upon it; that the Russian hosts would sweep down from the north, and wrest it from the blood-stained hands of the tyrant.

But he did not stay there long. He knew that he was many days' journey from Van, and that he must not forget the purpose

for which he had come to the East. His Western training served him well here, too. It led him to pay a visit to the chief Armenian priest of the town, and get letters of introduction to some of the most important people of his faith, who lived farther south.

This Armenian priest, when he learnt that he was the son of Ibram Alexandropol, was eager to render him service, and gave him much advice as to the best roads to take, and the best places to stop at.

Victor never forgot the journey from Trebizond southward. In many respects both country and people were sordid, and grim and uninteresting; but in others it was sublime, although it was terrible in its sublimity. Snow-clad peaks, many thousands of feet high, pierced the heavens, and glistened in the sunlight. Rocky ravines cut deep into the depths of the valleys; rivers rushed in cataracts down the deep gorges. Sometimes hours passed without a sign of human habitation being visible, although he knew that in almost every valley, or buried among the crags of the mountains, people lived.

All through his journey he felt as though the clock of the world had been put back hundreds of years. The activities of the West, with all the products of modern science, were practically unknown here. Railroads had not yet been made, while the ordinary roads were mere tracks. Thousands of people in the country districts had never received a letter in their lives, while telegrams were things unheard of.

Now and then they passed bands of wild lawless-looking men, who lived no one seemed to know how, and who were going on journeys no one seemed to know why or whither. These men carried antiquated-looking weapons, and seemed but little removed from the wild Ishmaelites of Biblical days.

And yet the mystery of everything seemed to contain something sinister. He realized it, as now and then he talked with his own people, and heard of privation and persecution and outrage. In the more populous districts, too, especially in such cities as Erzerum and Mush and Bitlis, there were signs of the advance of what suggested civilization. Good roads had been made, telegraph posts were seen, while now and then even motor-cars were visible.

But everything was utterly unlike what he had seen in England,

and many times he found himself saying to Yusef, 'Anything could happen here.'

It was not until they had left Bitlis behind, however, and neared the waters of the great Lake Van, that the mission upon which he had come assumed its true proportions. He was now in what was perhaps the most thickly populated part of Armenia. Villages were less rare, roads were better, while signs of industry and merchandise were everywhere visible. In two days, he reflected, he would reach Van, where he would meet his father's only sister and his cousin.

He found himself wondering what they would be like, and how they would receive him when he told them of his purpose in coming. Up to the present, he had seen but few evidences of the horrible condition of things which his aunt had mentioned in her letter to Admiral Trencrom. It is true he had heard rumours of wild happenings, and of unlawful deeds, which had been done among his people, but he had discovered nothing that bore out the terrible perils of which his aunt spoke. It is true he had heard of the grim power of Djevdet Bey, the Governor of Van, and of his terrible mercilessness towards the Armenian people. But as on every hand he saw their prosperity, and as he realized the comparative comfort in which they lived, he felt sure that her letter had grossly exaggerated the position.

Of course he would take them back to England, and he felt sure he would have no difficulty in doing so. As for the danger in which his aunt and cousin lived, he could not believe that it was anything like she had described.

Then, suddenly, his eyes were opened. It was while he was on his way from Bitlis to Van, and he was spending the night in a town not far from the great Lake.

The inn at which he stayed was typical of scores of others in the smaller towns. The rooms were dark and dirty, and the guests were comprised of a nondescript crew.

Victor was tired, and had gone to bed early. He had been asleep for about two hours when he was suddenly awakened by the sound of voices in the room adjoining his own. For some time he paid but little heed. More than once during his journey he had been kept awake for hours by the loud voices of Turks who had occupied the apartment contiguous to his own. Mostly

their conversation was neither interesting nor elevating ; and he imagined that these men were probably farmers or merchants, who were travelling from one town to another to dispose of their wares.

Then he heard two words which drove all sleep from him, and caused his every sense to be fully alert. These words were ' Djevdet Bey ' and ' Erzinghan.' He sat up in his bed, and listened eagerly. Erzinghan was his aunt's name, and Djevdet Bey was the Governor of Van, of whom she stood in deadly fear.

The partition between the two rooms was very thin, and the sound of the voices passed easily from one to the other. But for some time the purport of their conversation was not plain to him. That there was some design against his aunt he was sure ; that Djevdet Bey had employed these men for some purpose of his own was evident. He also caught the name of Adana Ulah, a name that was strange to him and which had no meaning to him.

Scarcely realizing what he did, he got out of his bed and crept closer to the wall, until even the faintest whisper could be heard clearly.

' What would you ? ' he heard one man say. ' Djevdet is mad for these two maidens, Armenians though they are. But up to now the woman has been able to protect them, and Djevdet is in many things a coward. Besides, there is a German Consul, an American Consul, and a British Consul in Van, besides the American Mission, which—may Allah's curse rest upon them !—has increased the Armenian influence, and given them safety.'

' German Consul ! ' laughed the other, ' surely he is but the tool of Djevdet ? '

' His master, you mean,' was the reply.

' Anyhow,' went on the other, ' Djevdet failed to fulfil his heart's desire.'

' Are these Armenian maidens beautiful, then ? '

' Fair as houris, eyes like stars, and voices like the tinkling of camels' bells on a frosty night.'

' But surely Djevdet could work his will ? '

' The woman Erzinghan is rich, and hath many friends, and she guards the maidens like a she-wolf guards her young.'

' And you say he has succeeded at length ? '

The other laughed. ‘ That is why I am here,’ was his reply. ‘ He has so worked upon her fears, and has caused such representations to be placed before the people at the American Mission, that she has been persuaded to send them to an Armenian convent. Ah, Djevdet is cunning ! ’

‘ I see no cunning in that, especially if he does not know where the convent is situated.’

The other laughed gleefully. ‘ Wisdom will die with you, Rascheed,’ he said, ‘ hath not Djevdet wise heads to counsel him ? Listen. Suppose that I have offered much money, accompanied by many threats if he fails, to an Armenian priest, to take these maidens to a place of refuge ? Suppose that this priest is known to this woman Erzinghan, and has her trust ? Suppose, too, that he buys the services of Armenian women, who will do anything for money, and they arrange to take them to one of the Armenian strongholds ? ’

‘ Yes, yes, and then ? ’

‘ Suppose I, to-morrow, burst upon the party suddenly, with a dozen of my men, and take them away ? ’

‘ Hath this been done ? ’

The other laughed. ‘ Even now they are more than a day’s journey from Van, and I have all in readiness. Who can blame Djevdet ? ’ he went on. ‘ How can it be traced to him ? ’

Eagerly Victor listened, never missing a word. That which a few hours before had seemed impossible had now become a grim reality. Even while his mind was excited by what he had heard, he remembered the phrase which he had so often repeated to Yusef : ‘ Nothing is impossible in this country.’ He saw, too, more clearly than ever, that what would seem like madness in England might here be only a commonplace event.

An hour later, when the men’s voices had ceased, he crept silently out of his room and went to the place where Yusef was lodged for the night.

‘ This is an Armenian town, isn’t it ? ’ he asked, when he had finished his story.

‘ Half the people are Armenians,’ was Yusef’s reply. He did not seem at all surprised at what Victor had told him. The abduction of Armenian girls was common.

‘ Djevdet Bey is a great man,’ he said, as he lit a cigarette,

' and Djevdet will work his will. But he had to make all these plans because he is Governor, and he is afraid of what the English and Armenians might do and say.'

' Do you know any of the Armenian people here ? '

' Two years ago,' replied Yusef, ' I was servant to an Armenian merchant, and I travelled in all these towns, and met many friends. What is it that master wills ? '

Rapidly Victor told him of a plan which had been born in his mind. Yusef's eyes flashed, and he laughed gaily.

' It will be a fight,' he said, ' and I love a fight.'

' I want to avoid that,' replied Victor. ' Now that I know what they mean to do, I can forestall them.'

' Who knows ? ' asked Yusef laconically.

' But you can get the men ? '

' I know many who will do anything for money,' replied the boy.

' And there is no time to waste. You'll be very careful, won't you ? ' he added, after he had finished his instructions.

Yusef looked at his master, as though the request grieved him. But his eyes glistened with excitement all the same. Up to now their journey had been comparatively uneventful, and what Victor had told him promised action, excitement.

' Perhaps it will mean a little blood-letting,' he said to himself, as he fingered his knife ; ' anyhow, it will be fun.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIGHT AMONG THE MOUNTAINS

VICTOR was in a gorge among the mountains, on the southern side of the Lake Van. A track ran up the valley, and near this track he had been waiting for more than an hour. Near to him, and hidden by the rocks, were a number of wild-looking youths armed to the teeth. They did not seem greatly excited ; they smoked endless cigarettes, and whispered one to the other. A stream rushed noisily down the narrow valley, drowning all other sounds. On the right hand and on the left great jagged rocks protruded themselves, while up above them a bird of prey soared in the clear blue sky.

The scene was striking in desolation ; not a tree was to be seen, and no verdure appeared save for a kind of starved desert grass. Everywhere were great rough jagged rocks. An hour before, when Victor had arrived at this place, he was excited beyond measure. It was the place he had heard described the night before. It was known as the Gorge of Evil Spirits, and he had been guided to it without difficulty. Minute after minute he had waited and watched expectantly, but when more than an hour had passed by, and there was neither sight nor sound of any living creature, it seemed to him that he had come on a mad mission. Situated as he was in the very heart of Asia Minor, his early Western training held him strongly. In spite of what he had heard, the thing seemed madly impossible, and more than once he asked himself whether he had not been dreaming when he thought he heard the men's conversation. The idea of rescuing two helpless girls from a band of Turks seemed to have no more foundation in fact than the stories in the *Arabian Nights*. The thing could not be, it was only a chimera of the mind.

Then, when he saw the face of Yusef, and those of the men he had gathered together, he realized that he was in the East, where anything, everything, was possible. Added to this, one of the men had come back nearly half an hour before, and had reported that a mile farther up the valley a band of Turks was waiting, as if in expectation of some one arriving. This had borne out what he had heard on the previous night, and made him realize that he was not dreaming, but was probably to take part in what, in England, would be called a grim tragedy.

Minute after minute passed, and still no one came. Then, creeping from behind the rock where he sat, he followed the course of the stream, until he was able to see a mile down the valley. He was no longer able to doubt now, for in the clear light he saw a party coming towards him. As far as he could make out, there were four women, and three men, one of whom was a grey-haired, grey-bearded man dressed in the garb of an Armenian priest.

Slowly they travelled towards him, and he, unseen by them, was able to watch them closely. As they drew nearer, their features became plain. He saw that the priest must be at least sixty years of age, and wore a brimless, stovepipe-looking hat. Two of the women were elderly, and as far as he could judge belonged to some religious Order. The other two, who rode apart, were dressed after the fashion of well-to-do Christian women. They wore no veils, and their garb was more European than Turkish. These two, Victor felt sure, were his cousin Urmia Erzinghan and the Adana Ulah of whom he had heard on the previous night.

The air was so clear that even while they were some distance away he could discern their features plainly, and he found himself wondering which was his cousin, and which her friend. While both girls were evidently of the East, they presented a marked contrast to each other. One was somewhat diminutive in stature, and suggested a timid, shrinking girl who depended on others for support and guidance. She was dark-haired and dark-eyed, like the rest of her people, but showed no signs of the wild, passionate daring which Western people often associate with the daughters of the East.

The other was cast in a larger mould. She sat her horse

boldly and confidently, as though she were a trained horsewoman. She possessed an air of resolution which was absent from the other, and Victor could not help feeling that in spite of her Eastern training she was capable of anything.

The two other men, who rode behind, were evidently servants.

Nearer and nearer they came, and although words were evidently passing between them, every sound was drowned by the roar of the stream which rushed down the rocky valley.

Victor crept back towards his party, and gave them rapid instructions. Yusef threw his half-burnt cigarette away, while his followers rose to their feet expectantly, as if preparing for action, laughing as they did so.

Slowly the party came up the valley, until they came to the spot known in the town as the Gorge of Evil Spirits. Evidently they expected nothing to occur, for the smaller of the two girls was laughing gaily, although the eyes of the other were cast swiftly around, as if apprehensive.

When they reached a certain spot, Victor rushed out from behind a great rock, and stopped their horses, while the men Yusef had engaged stood in the rear, and blocked the way from behind.

'I will relieve you of your care,' said Victor, like one playing a part, 'you will deliver up your charge to me, Father Mahud.'

'Who are you, that stop peaceful people from travelling?' said the priest, with some show of anger, 'if you are robbers, we have nothing to give you.'

'We are not robbers,' replied Victor, 'you can keep all your money. We would only relieve you of the charge of these fair maidens. As you will see, resistance will be useless, but you must do as you are told.'

'What would you have me do?' said the priest, with apparent helplessness.

'Return to the place from whence you came,' was Victor's reply, 'you and these two women and your servants.'

'But I have sworn to protect these children of my faith, and to take them to a place of safe refuge,' replied the priest.

Victor laughed gaily. 'Fair ones such as these should not be under your protection,' was his reply. 'I will see that no harm happens to them, and that their future shall be as bright and as

glorious as the western sky at sunset, when there are no clouds. Such as they, young and fair and beautiful, must not waste their presence on an old greybeard like thee.'

'Ah !' cried the priest piteously, 'but these ladies are tenderly reared, and they were committed to my charge by a worthy lady, who is the mother of one of them. I beseech your lordship to allow us to proceed on our journey.'

Victor laughed again, as though he were vastly enjoying himself. 'Go back to your prayers, Father Mahud, while you have a sound skin. You see that resistance is useless. If you do not yield peaceably, then I must use force, and that would be painful to me before such birds of Paradise as these.'

The two elderly women, who had not spoken, turned to the girls. 'You see how we are placed, Adana,' they said piteously, 'we can do nothing.'

'Yes,' said the priest, 'we must even do as they have said. We are helpless. Oh, I am grieved, my children, that this calamity should have befallen, but what can we do ? We are in the power of these Turks, and there is no safety for us anywhere.'

The girls had by this time drawn close together, until their horses touched, and the smaller of the two had caught hold of the other's arm and held it convulsively.

'But you promised that no harm should happen to us.' It was the bolder or more resolute of the two girls who spoke. 'You said the road was safe.'

'Yes, I know,' whined the priest; 'I was mistaken.'

'Where are the men who were with us yesterday ? Why did you discharge them ?'

'I was told the road was safe, the gendarmes assured me that all was well.'

'Who are these men, then ?' asked the girl, casting an angry glance toward Victor.

'I know not,' was the reply, 'they are strangers to me. Doubtless they are godless Turks, who have waylaid innocent and helpless Christians.'

By this time a number of Yusef's men had forced their way in between the horses of the two elder women and the priest until the two girls were surrounded. Weakly the priest and

the women submitted, while their two followers had scuttled away, leaving them alone.

'Go,' said Victor, 'while you may. I give you a chance of saving your skin. As for these maidens, they go with us.'

A minute later, the priest and the two women were going down the valley as fast as their horses could carry them, leaving the girls alone with Victor and his party.

'Oh, Adana!' cried the smaller of the two girls, 'this is horrible! What shall we do?'

The bold, resolute eyes of the other turned steadily on Victor. 'Who are you, and what do you want?' she asked.

Victor commanded his followers to stand aside, and then he went up close to the girls.

'Read this, and you will know,' he said.

The one addressed as Adana snatched the letter from him, and read eagerly. As she did so, a look of astonishment and bewilderment filled her eyes.

'Urmia,' she cried, 'this is your mother's letter, written to your friend in England!'

'And I am Urmia's cousin,' said Victor, 'do you understand?'

'But why are you here?' gasped the girl, 'why did you come in this way?'

'Listen,' he replied eagerly, and then rapidly he told his story.

'Then they?' cried Adana, nodding toward the retreating priest and the woman.

'Were the tools of Djevdet Bey,' interrupted Victor. 'Did you see how eager they were to get away, how willing they were to leave you in my care? They thought I was the leader of the band hired by the Governor. They are only fulfilling a bargain they made with his minions. That was why he dismissed the men that your mother provided as your escort and safety.'

'Then you—you are my cousin!' cried Urmia, looking wonderingly into his eyes.

'If you are Urmia Erzinghan, from Van, I am,' replied Victor, with a laugh. 'Will you trust me?' he added. 'I assure you, I mean only your good and your welfare. These fellows are all of our faith, whom my servant knows, and whom I have hired for this purpose.'

'But what will you do?' asked Adana, 'will you take us back to Van again?'

'If it is your will,' replied Victor, 'but I do not think it would be wise. The Governor of Van will know of your return, and I do not think you would be safe there. As I told you, I spent one night at the Convent at Khaskoi, where I had a letter of introduction from the Patriarch at Trebizond. They would take you and guard you, until you could find a better place of refuge. But whatever you decide upon must be decided quickly.'

'Why?' asked the girl.

'Because a mile farther on a number of Djevdet's men are waiting. It was they whom Father Mahud expected. He thinks we are they. Will you trust me? I promise I will do all I can for you.' And again he laughed gaily, for he was enjoying the adventure, the romance of it appealed to his young heart and nature.

'You, my cousin Urmia,' went on Victor, looking towards her, 'will you trust me? You know who I am, I have given you proofs. But please be quick.'

Urmia looked at him wonderingly, and then turned to her friend as if in doubt.

'Yes, he is my cousin, Adana,' she said excitedly. 'I am sure he is. What shall we do?'

'I am afraid you can do no better,' laughed Victor, 'see, I find that you know English a little—you can read my passport, if you will, to make further assurance,' and he handed it to her.

But Adana did not take it. Instead, she looked at him for some seconds as if she would read his very soul.

'Yes,' she said suddenly, and her voice was steady, 'we will trust you.'

'Thank you,' said Victor, 'you shall not regret it. Two hundred yards up from here another gorge runs into this. We must follow that, and so escape Djevdet Bey's men. If we have good luck, we may miss them altogether, and get to the convent without mishap. Yusef my servant knows the road, and we could get there in eight or ten hours. It will be a long ride, but I am sure you are brave girls.'

'Come,' said Adana, 'we are ready.'

'Come,' said Victor, springing to his horse.

It was as he said, and quickly they found their way along the rough pathway he had mentioned. An hour later they were out in the open country, where travelling was easier.

'This is great luck,' said Victor, 'I often wondered how I should meet you, but I did not think it would be in this way. You are not afraid, are you?' he said, turning to Urmia. 'I am your cousin, you know. May I call you Urmia?' He laughed as he spoke, and the girl caught his humour.

'I know you now,' she said shyly. 'At home we have a picture of my uncle, when he was young like you, and you are just like him. Oh, it is good to think we have some one we can trust in. And it is wonderful that you should have come all the way from England to help us.'

'Had I known what you were like,' said Victor, 'I should have been more eager. I am sorry we have not met under happier circumstances, although this is great fun. I am so glad you trust me, too,' and he turned to Adana as he spoke.

Adana gave him a glance which set his nerves tingling, he did not know why. In his boyish way, he reflected that they presented a splendid contrast to each other, and yet they completed each other. Perhaps he was more interested in his cousin—she was more confiding, less able to care for herself.

'But Djevdet Bey's men will know they have been deceived,' said Adana, 'will they not follow us?'

'If they do, we can give a good account of ourselves,' laughed Victor, glancing toward the rough-looking, swarthy men around him. 'I hope it will not come to a fight; but if it does—'

Before he could complete the sentence, Yusef came quickly to his side. 'See, master,' he said excitedly, nodding towards a band of wild-looking fellows who were coming quickly upon them.

A few minutes later, Victor knew what it meant to be in a fight between two bands of men in Asia Minor. The struggle had come so suddenly that he scarcely realized what he was doing before he found himself fighting like grim death with the leader of Djevdet Bey's men. Pistol shots were exchanged, and knives were used freely. It was a rough-and-tumble affair, seemingly without plan or purpose, save that it was evident the attackers determined to take away the two girls. It was a scrimmage,

where the largest numbers and the boldest hearts won. Still, it was severe while it lasted, and the leader of Djevdet Bey's men evidently believed that if he could conquer Victor, the battle would be his. He was a great, over-fed Turk, of middle age. At the first glance it would seem that Victor, who looked small-boned and slim compared to him, would stand but little chance. But the Turk had more flesh than muscle, and he had not the training of an English athlete, and was utterly ignorant of a scrimmage in a football field.

Victor, who was in perfect training, and without an ounce too much flesh, soon measured his man, and the Turk gradually found himself beaten. Victor laughed, as he heard the Turk gasping for breath, and saw the look of fear in his eyes. He was no longer the young University student, with a reputation for learning in the literature of the East: he was a son of the East, with elemental passion burning in his heart, fighting for his life, and what was dearer than life, and the two women he had vowed to protect.

The great Turk fell gurgling to the ground, but as he did so a scream rent the air.

'Victor, beware!'

He felt a stab between his shoulder blades, followed by a howl of anger behind him.

A few minutes later, all the attackers had left, save three, among whom was the leader of the gang, and another who had struck Victor with a knife from behind. They were evidently badly wounded, if not dead.

'Are you hurt badly, master?' It was Yusef who spoke.

'It is nothing,' replied Victor, staggering a little, 'I—I don't think the knife went deep.'

'It was the lady Adana who saved you,' panted Yusef, 'if she had been a second earlier, she would have stopped the man from striking you altogether. If she had not gone to you, he would have killed you. I was twenty yards away, and had only just finished with my man. But the knife did not go deep, the lady Adana saw to that.'

'It is nothing,' cried Victor, who laughed as he spoke. 'By Jove, it was a fine bit of work! See, they are all gone, except these three fellows, who will not trouble us again for a bit. But

we must get away, that is certain, we must get on at once ! Urmia, are you all right ?

' Yes, yes,' gasped the girl.

' You saved my life,' he said simply to Adana. ' But we mustn't wait. I hope later to—to tell you better how—how I thank you.'

He clambered to his horse as he spoke, still laughing gaily, but his face was as pale as death. He scarcely realized all that had taken place.

' None of our men are dead,' said Yusef coolly, lighting a cigarette as he spoke ; ' they can manage all right. You are wise, master, we must travel fast.'

Yusef had been enjoying himself vastly, and now that he believed his master was safe he had not a care.

An hour later, however, he saw with anxious eyes that his master swayed in his saddle, and that he had dropped his bridle rein.

' Your wound is bad, master. You have lost much blood ; I know the signs. We must spend the night here.'

' No. We must get on. Do not let them know, Yusef ; they must not know that—that—'

Victor set his teeth together, and by a grim effort of will, he overcame the faintness that was overwhelming him.

' It was that blow in the back,' he said. ' It would have killed me but for her.'

' The Ulah's were always brave,' said Yusef. ' Her father might have lived if he would have betrayed his people. It was in '99 ; it was but little known, but the Turks made a raid on one of our villages where he was lord. They fought to the last, but the Turks killed all save the pretty girls. The lady Adana's mother was destined for the Governor's harem, but the lord Ulah fought on. When all hope was gone, he killed her.'

' What, killed his wife ? '

' He killed her rather than that she should be a plaything for the Governor. Then they killed him. They would have done that in any case.'

' And Adana—how was she saved ? '

' The little lady Adana had been sent to Van for safety, where she had relatives. But her father's blood is in her veins. The

lady Urmia gave a cry when the man came up to you from behind with a knife, but the lady Adana gripped his arm and fought. Yes, master, you owe your life to her. Ah, but you fought a great fight !'

They were riding along a mountain track where there was only room for two horses to travel abreast. A few yards behind rode the two girls.

' We have three hours yet, master,' said Yusef a little later. He had been watching his master closely, and saw that his strength was ebbing away. ' You cannot hold out until we reach Khaskoi.'

' I must ! I will !' and there was desperation in his tones. ' The night air is refreshing me,' he added. ' Give me more of that cordial you carry, Yusef. We must reach Khaskoi to-night. After that it does not matter.'

Hour after hour passed by, and still he held on. He felt the blood oozing from his wounds, he knew he was becoming weaker and weaker, that the very centres of his life were being undermined. Minute by minute his pain increased, but he made no sound. He was thankful that daylight had gone so that Adana and Urmia could not see his face. Presently the agony became almost unbearable.

' Half an hour more, and we are there, master.'

He hardly heard the words, and he was scarcely capable of thinking. The one thing that filled his brain was that he must not fall from his horse until the journey's end.

He saw a single light in the near distance. He heard Yusef speaking, but his voice seemed far away. He felt himself falling, and he knew that his strength had gone at last. But he was strangely upheld ; he knew not how.

' We are here, master ; all is well. Thanks be to God who has upheld us.'

But Victor scarcely heard. A dim consciousness possessed him that his work was done, and that those whom he had sworn to protect were in safety, but beyond that nothing save a strange joy which pervaded his whole being. Then all became dark.

Days, weeks, months seemed to pass. Now and then were fleeting moments of consciousness, but they were only moments.

He was taking strange journeys, travelling new dreary regions, meeting with many difficulties ; but all was as a dream. Nothing was real or abiding. . . .

He was conscious, but he was tired, almost too tired to breathe. His weakness was like a great weight upon him. It was a pain to live, yet he was glad he was alive. . . .

Time still passed, and he knew he was stronger ; he felt that his body was being restored to health ; but he realized this only dimly, for his mind refused to grasp anything firmly. It was as though his mind and his body were apart, and would not be united. He dwelt in darkness. . . .

Then suddenly light came. The past flashed before him like lightning ; he remembered everything. He felt strong, too. He could move his limbs freely, and he had no pain.

An old woman was in the room. She had a kindly face, and looked towards him with benevolent interest.

' I am better,' he said. ' I am somewhere in Khaskoi.'

He found himself speaking the language of his own people, although he was thinking in English.

' You are sure you are better ?' said the woman, regarding him curiously.

' Yes, I am better. I am strangely strong, too. How long have I been here ? And tell me this, too : does Urmia's mother know ? Did Yusef go to Van and tell her ?'

The woman gave him another quick glance, and hastily left the room.

A little later she returned accompanied by an elderly man who looked at him attentively.

Victor began to repeat his questions.

' Wait. I am a doctor. I'll soon let you know if you may talk.'

The doctor's examination was evidently satisfactory, for a few minutes later he said—

' Yes, everything is normal. You have a wonderful constitution, and you have had a wonderful escape. Your mind had better be set to rest at once. What were you asking ? '

Victor eagerly repeated the questions he had asked of the woman ; all of which the doctor answered assuringly.

‘ Then they are well—they are safe ? ’ he urged.

‘ Yes, well ;—but safe ? Yes, for the moment.’

‘ What do you mean ? ’

‘ I mean that you have been ill for more than three months. That for weeks we despaired of your life. It was in June you came, and now it is September.’

He tried to understand the purport of this, and then cried eagerly—

‘ More than three months ; then—then—’

‘ Much has happened. Europe is at war. Germany has forced it. France, England, Russia are ranged against Germany and Austria. Germany has driven the French and the English back to the very gates of Paris. She has swept over Belgium ; she is conquering everywhere. Every day we are expecting to hear that they have taken Calais, and they say they will be in London in a few weeks. Forgive me, I ought not to have told you all this at once.’

‘ No, no, it is right ; I want to know. Tell me more.’

‘ I fear Germany will conquer ! ’

Victor laughed. ‘ Germany conquer England ! What rot ! ’

‘ And even that is not the worst. Turkey is going to join Germany, and—and—’

‘ Turkey ! The Sick Man of Europe ! What can Turkey do ? ’

‘ She can do much. As for my people—oh, my lad, I dare not tell you ! You are not strong enough.’

‘ Yes, I am quite strong. My brain is clear again. Tell me.’

‘ Very well then, listen.’

CHAPTER IX

WAR AND RUMOURS OF WAR

D R. KALAAT, for that was his name, hesitated a second, then he burst out despairingly—

‘All your efforts to save Urmia Erzinghan and Adana Ulah were vain efforts.’

‘But you told me they were safe !’

‘For the moment, yes ; but we are living only from minute to minute, and I have reason to fear that Djevdet Bey has discovered their hiding-place. For months he has been searching. We have done our utmost, but through treachery he has found out everything !’

‘You are sure of this ?’

‘Only to-day I heard it.’

‘But there is a Government. There is a British Consul at Erzerum !’

‘That fact did not save them when they were at Van months ago and things grew worse every day. Did I not tell you that Germany, the real ruler of Turkey, is at war with England ? British Consuls are as powerless as children. When the women escaped from Van they only had the Governor to fear, now it is the Turkish Government. And it is not only they, it is the whole of our race who are in danger.’

‘Tell me in a word what you mean.’

‘This : Germany is as I told you the real ruler of Turkey. While Germany was at peace with England, the British Consuls had a semblance of influence. Now they have none. You see that ? Turkey is on the point of joining Germany, it is only a matter of weeks, it may be of days. Turkey hates the Armenians because we are educated and prosperous, and because we are Christians, and they will be glad of any pretext to turn upon

us as they have in the past. Germany means to strengthen her hold on Turkey, and Germany sees that if she is to have the wealth of Turkey, the Armenians must be destroyed. We are the bankers, the merchants, the manufacturers, the trading people of Turkey, therefore it is not only Turkey but Germany that means to destroy us. This will mean—God only knows what it will mean ! ”

‘ You are sure of this ? ’

‘ I only know what the Turks say. We are a persecuted race, therefore we have to be constantly vigilant. We have to watch whatever wind that blows, and we have many watchers.’

‘ I see, I see.’

His mind, which had been lying dormant for months, had sprung into life. While his body had been gaining strength, his mind had been sleeping. Now it was more than normally awake. He remembered what he had heard for years ; he called to mind what Mr. John Penwithen had said to him in Aleppo, what he had heard the Turks whisper during his journey from Trebizond to Bitlis, and he understood.

Whatever the Turks desired from the Armenians they could get ; no life would be safe, no place a sanctuary. Men would be butchered, while the women, especially the young and the fair, would suffer a fate which would be a thousand times worse.

But even then he did not realize the full purport of Dr. Kalaat’s words. What wonder ?

He was silent a few seconds, then he said like one weary—

‘ Would you mind leaving me for a while, doctor ? I can think no more. I—I would sleep.’

He fell asleep almost as he spoke, while the doctor, who was angry with himself for having so foolishly spoken to a man just dragged from the jaws of death, watched him anxiously.

‘ I acted like a fool,’ he said to himself. ‘ I am so overwhelmed with fear that I forgot the most elementary precautions. But no harm is done. His health is regular, his pulses are steady. He will awake strong.’

Dr. Kalaat was right. When Victor woke a few hours afterwards, his mind was clear, and he felt strength returning to him. When he had partaken of food, he asked if a newspaper was obtainable.

It was a miserable little rag that was brought to him, and it had been published at Erzerum a week before, but it gave him a rough idea of how matters stood. War had been declared. Germany and Austria faced Russia in the East, and France and England in the West. Belgium was conquered. King Albert's scattered forces held only a few square miles of their country. The Germans were strong and prepared, while the other nations were unprepared. Ever since the beginning of August they had been marching forward victoriously, villages and towns had been taken, fortresses had fallen like card castles. Germany was certain of victory. In the West she would annex Belgium, she would crush France, she would claim a huge indemnity, and she would demand the right to dominate the French seaboard. That would enable her to attack England, and England had no army.

In the East, she would hold the Balkan States in the hollow of her hand, and crush Russia. Therefore Turkey must espouse Germany's cause. With Germany victorious, Turkey would get back her possessions in the Balkan States, and she would get back complete control of Egypt.

Turkey had great dreams. With Germany at her back, and by the aid of German trained armies, she would defy Russia, she would be master in her own house. 'Turkey for the Turks ;' that was the Young Turks' watchword. All who were alien in sympathy to Turkey must be swept aside. Allah was great, and they were Allah's chosen people.

That was what Victor read in the badly written, badly printed sheet which went by the name of *The Orient*. Every line of the paper was feverishly excited. War was demanded. Turkey must fight for Turkey. She must shake off the incubus of Russia, she must crush those who had been battenning and grown fat on Turkey's wealth. None but those who loved Turks and Turkey must be considered worthy to live within her borders. She must gain back lost territory, too. Serbia, Rumania, Bulgaria, must give up what they had gained during the Balkan wars. This was only possible by Turkey drawing the sword on the side of Germany.

Victor understood Dr. Kalaat's fears now. But what could be done ?

He could perhaps find his way back to England, and join the British Army. But no, he would stay among his own people, he would help them. But how? The paper spoke of a general conscription, of taking every male from eighteen to forty-five years of age in the Turkish Empire and compelling them to bear arms. If that were done, and he remained in Turkey, he would be compelled to become a Turkish soldier. In the past the Armenians had been allowed to volunteer for military service, and they had fought so bravely against the Balkan States that they had been especially commended for their bravery. But they had been volunteers.

Now, according to this paper, there were suggestions of universal conscription. This would mean, if Turkey declared war on the side of Germany, that Armenians as well as Turks would have to fight the English. It meant more than that. It meant that he, unless he avowed himself an Englishman, would be commandeered with the rest. On the other hand he would, as an Englishman, be in dire peril and powerless to act.

A great temptation came to him. Why should he stay in Turkey? War was not yet declared, and he would be free to leave. He had for the moment delivered his cousin and her friend. Was not that enough? What could be gained by attempting the impossible? He longed for the freedom of England, longed to join her forces. If he went back to Trenchrom, he would see Ethel Tregenna, and his heart's desires would be fulfilled.

But even as the picture of the sweet-faced English girl flashed before his eyes, he saw other faces. He saw that of his cousin. He saw her dark pleading eyes and tremulous lips; he saw, too, the face of Adana Ulah, and it seemed to him full of reproach. She seemed to be calling to him to stay in Turkey, and fight for her honour, her safety, her life. And there was magic in her look, a magic he could not understand. But more than all this, the misery of his own people rose up before his mind's eyes. He saw beseeching hands beckoning him to help them.

No; love, happiness, civilization even, were not for him. He had put his hand to the plough, and he must not turn back.

A knock came to the door, and a few seconds later Yusef was admitted. The lad's eyes shone brightly as he saw his master,

and then as he realized how thin and pale Victor was, they became dim with tears.

'I have come many days, master,' he said, 'but this is the first time I have been admitted into your presence. It is good to see you. You will get better.'

Victor welcomed him warmly. The boy's presence made him feel less lonely, less helpless.

'I have been to Van,' went on Yusef, 'I thought it would be your wish. I went there to tell the lady Urmia's mother what had been done.'

'That is well. What did she say to you ?'

'She was in great sorrow and fear. Van is in a state of turmoil. Many of our people live there, and it is whispered that some great trouble is coming. But she is very grateful to you. I gave her letters from the lady Urmia and the lady Adana Ulah, and they brought great joy to her. Those letters told her of all you did, and she besought me to tell you to go to her as soon as your strength came back. She still fears Djevdet Bey, because she said he would be sure to find their hiding-place.'

'Dr. Kalaat thinks he has discovered it.'

'Dr. Kalaat is a timid old woman,' said Yusef scornfully. 'He mistakes the buzzing of a fly for an armed host. He fears his own shadow.'

'Do you not think he is right ?'

'Who knows ?' replied the lad. 'Bitlis, Van, Mush, Erzerum, and all the villages around are full of gossip. Some say one thing, some another. This I know, there are many Germans in Erzerum.'

'You have been there ?'

The lad nodded. 'I do not listen to all stories, neither do I cry out before I am hurt,' he said. 'But there is mystery in the air, master, and I do not like many things. In the past I have learnt things easily. Now I can learn nothing. Every one seems suspicious.'

'The lady Adana and the lady Urmia must be kept in safety,' said Victor. 'If they are not safe here, they must be moved elsewhere. And my aunt must be brought to them.'

'The lady Erzinghan will not be allowed to leave Van,' said

Yusef. 'She is constantly watched.' Djevdet Bey sees to that. Besides, what place is safe ?'

'We must do something,' said Victor weakly, then he went on: 'Before we can do anything, we must know. We know nothing. All is gossip, hearsay, weak women's talk.'

He was silent a few seconds, then his eyes flashed.

'That is it, Yusef,' he said, 'we must know. Leave me now; I want to think.'

The next day he was strong enough to get out of bed, and in the afternoon the two girls whom he had rescued came to him. Victor looked at them curiously. When he had seen them before they were in travelling attire, and their minds were torn with anxiety; now they were dressed more like the girls he knew in England, although there were many suggestions of the East in their appearance. Both looked well and free from care, and both seemed joyous when they saw him.

'Victor,' said Urmia shyly, 'I am afraid you must think me cold and ungrateful; but you came so suddenly, and that day was so terrible, that I could hardly think of you as one of my own blood. But afterwards I realized.'

She lifted his hand to her lips as she spoke and kissed it.

'Every day I prayed for you,' she went on. 'I prayed for Victor my cousin. I may call you Victor, mayn't I? A lady who works at the American Mission in Van told me that all Americans and English call their cousins by their Christian names; and I love to think of you as Victor. Besides, you fought for me, didn't you? Yes, and you conquered that great ugly Turk.'

Victor realized what a sweet voice she had, and thought how pleasant it was to hear her, and he told her so.

'And now we must go,' she continued, 'for Dr. Kalaat told me we must only stay a few minutes, and I would not tire you for anything.'

'Don't go yet,' he pleaded. 'You have not yet told me how you fare here. Besides, the lady Adana has said nothing,' and he looked eagerly towards her. 'Are you well and happy here?' he asked.

'Well,' replied Adana, 'yes, but happy? For many days we were troubled, for the doctor feared you would die. If you

had I would have sought the Turk who struck the coward blow, and—and—' She did not conclude the sentence, but walked towards the window and looked out upon the rugged mountains which lifted their bare peaks to the skies.

' Ah, but I did not die,' laughed Victor. ' I am almost well again. It is time, too. I must be up and doing.'

' Yes, that is your joy,' and Adana's eyes flashed. ' A man can *do*, but a woman can do nothing, *nothing!* That is why I am not happy here. We are told we should be happy because we are in a place of safety. But safety is not all, because it is not life. In England, I am told, girls live; here we only exist from day to day.'

There was a touch of passion in her voice, and her great black eyes flashed:

' But safety in times like these means a great deal,' said Victor.

' In times like these!' she repeated. ' What are they? A woman does not know. We are told there is a great war, and that Turkey is going to join in it; but what is that to us, to Urmia and me? We can do nothing.'

' Perhaps you will be able to do a great deal,' was Victor's rejoinder.

' Can I?' she cried. She took a step towards him as she spoke. ' I am not your cousin,' she went on, ' I cannot like Urmia call you by your Christian name.'

' Why not?' laughed Victor. ' Please do.'

A strange look shone in her eyes, a look which Victor could not understand. She shook her head.

' It would not be seemly, and yet Urmia is not more grateful than I. You saved our lives, and more than our lives, and I will never forget it. If ever I do the sun will set never to rise again, and I shall have no power to remember. No, I will not forget, and it may be the time will come when I, a poor helpless girl, may be able to help you.'

She hesitated a second, and then went on, ' If ever that time does come, I will gladly offer my life for you. You will not forget that, will you?'

' Time to go.'

Both words and voice seemed harsh. They were spoken by

an elderly woman, a sister in the Convent, who had accompanied them.

'But—but there is no need,' protested Victor.

'Time to go. Doctor's orders,' persisted the dame. There was no feeling in her voice. She might have forgotten what it was to be young.

For an hour afterwards Victor recalled every word that had been spoken, with a strange joy in his heart. All desire to go back to England had gone now. He was glad to be in this country of mystery and terror, and as he remembered what Dr. Kalaat had said, the helplessness of his people, and especially of these two young girls, appealed to him more than ever.

Yes, whatever happened, he must be near to help them. But how?

He reflected on the situation. 'Before we can do anything we must *know*,' he had said, and his words were true. And he *would* know. He would get to the bottom of the terror which stalked by day and flew by night. But how? He sat for a long time thinking.

Presently there was another knock at the door, and Dr. Kalaat entered accompanied by an Armenian priest. As soon as the former had seen to it that his patient was progressing favourably, both he and the priest began to speak about the persistent rumours which grew darker hour by hour.

'And we are helpless, helpless,' said the priest.

'You are helpless,' said Victor presently, with a touch of impatience in his voice, 'because you do not know. All you have been telling me is as vague as a cloud. You are certain of nothing. We cannot act until we know.'

'But how can we know? The Turks will tell us nothing. We only hear the threatenings of the storm. We fear awful things. Those who seek to find out are threatened.'

'That's because you do not go the right way to work.'

'What can we do? We are suspects. For centuries we have been persecuted. We have always been led as sheep to the slaughter.'

'If you had been English you would have mastered your masters.'

'How can we? We are watched night and day. We have

promises, but the promises only mock us. Come, you have lived in England, what would you do?"

Victor looked at them for a few seconds questioningly. He was afraid to trust them. Then he began to ask them questions. The two timid men grew more and more frightened as they made their replies, but presently both of them saw that he did not seek knowledge in vain.

' You see what is in my mind,' said the young fellow presently.
' Will you help me? '

' But it is madness! If you are discovered your life will not be worth a bishleck.'

' But I'll not be discovered. I'll match my brains against theirs. As I have said, we do nothing because we are ignorant. And we must know. You say you can do this? '

' Great God, Kalaat,' said the priest, ' but it's a daring thing to do! And as it happens, we have it in our power to arrange this. But—but—'

' It's not you who are running the risk,' said Victor. ' I do not promise great results; but it may help.'

' I should not have dared,' replied the doctor, ' but it is great. In a week what you ask for shall be done, and by that time you will be strong enough to act.'

CHAPTER X

TALAAT BEY'S SECRETARY

TOWARDS the end of September, 1914, a young man accompanied by his servant entered the city of Erzerum. Apparently he belonged to the higher orders of the Turks. His clothes were rich in quality, and he carried himself proudly, as if accustomed to command.

People nodded to each other as he rode along the principal street, and whispered approvingly.

'Evidently,' they said, 'a young lord from Constantinople. He will make his way to the Governor's palace.'

But this he did not do. Stopping at the door of a large house in the main street of the city, he nodded to his servant, who immediately dismounted, evidently for the purpose of seeking admission for his master.

'Ah! he seeks admission to old Talaat Bey. That is sure proof that he comes from Constantinople.' For there were two Talaat Beys: one of international fame, and the one of whom the people spoke.

On the door being opened, the servant spoke to some one inside the house, and handed him papers.

'My master would see your master,' he said significantly.

'Talaat Bey never speaks to strangers,' was the reply.

'Besides, he has much to do.'

'My master waits, and it is not meet that such as he should abide in the open streets. Take this to your lord.'

The man gave a searching glance to the richly caparisoned youth in the street, who sat on a restive horse, and seemed oblivious to the eager looks on the faces of those who stood by watching. Evidently he seemed satisfied that the visitor was of importance, for he hurried across a courtyard, and made his way

up some stone steps towards an upper chamber of the building.

A few minutes later he returned, and intimated that Talaat Bey would see the stranger.

Talaat Bey was the man most feared in Erzerum. Formerly he had held high office in the city, under Abdul of fearful fame. By his strong personality he had dominated the region around Erzerum. His smile had meant prosperity, his frown ruin and often death. When the Young Turks came into power, a new Governor was appointed, but Talaat Bey did not move from his palace, neither did he seem to lose his command. The new Governor, a creature of the Young Turkish Government, occupied the new Governor's palace, and lived in great state. But it was whispered among many that he took his orders from the old chief. There was a new figure-head, but the Government, the people said, was the same.

Talaat Bey had the reputation of being a very religious man. Each morning, before attending to the affairs of the city and province, he found his way into the great mosque close by, where he spent some time in prayer. Some had it that in secret he belonged to one of the most fanatical sects of dervishes that existed in Asia Minor. The new Governor reigned, but Talaat Bey ruled. That was the feeling which obtained in Erzerum in September, 1914, when the young stranger rode down the streets.

On hearing that Talaat Bey would receive him, the youth leisurely dismounted from the beautiful grey stallion, and cast a careless glance towards the crowd who, among the Turks, can never seem to do business without much noise; he crossed the courtyard, and followed the servant up the dirty stone stairway. Outwardly the youth was perfectly calm, but a close observer would have noticed the strained, eager look in his eyes, and would have seen that his every nerve was in tension.

The servant salaamed before him as he led the way to the room where Talaat Bey was. When the door had closed behind him, he took a quick, eager look around the compartment. It was a large room, every detail of which suggested the Oriental mind. The floor coverings, the furniture, the curtains, as well as the architecture, spoke of the East.

Seated behind a great heap of papers was an old man, perhaps

seventy years of age, although the keen flash of his black eyes, and the expression of quick resolution on his face, gave no evidence of age. Tall, lean, muscular, he was almost of gigantic proportions, and his face once seen was not soon forgotten. It was the face of a man who had seen, one who had dug deep into human experience, and had controlled the destinies of men.

He gave a piercing look toward the young man who had just entered, and was silent a few seconds before speaking. Then, giving a quick glance towards a paper which lay before him, he said—

‘ You are Suliman, grandson of the great Abdul Hamid, and son of Mahmud by his youngest wife. You have come as it was promised.’

The youth bowed, a sign of assent.

‘ Your father was killed by the new Government, eh ? His lands confiscated ? ’

The youth gave another sign of assent, but spoke no word.

‘ But for the Revolution,’ went on the old man, ‘ you would be great in the Government of Turkey ; you come of a royal line.’

‘ I am Suliman Ulkonia,’ he said, speaking for the first time. ‘ I am poor, but I can be useful as a faithful secretary. Whatever my rank I can do the work you require to be done.’

Again the old man looked at him steadily, the other bearing his scrutiny without moving a muscle of his face.

‘ You would see Turkey ruled by the Turks, you would see strangers driven away ? You know the languages of the West, as of the East ? You can fight them with their own weapons ? ’

The youth handed him a sealed parchment. ‘ It is written there,’ was all he said.

The old Turk glanced eagerly at the superscription, and then read the contents. While he read, the youth watched his face with evident anxiety. It might seem as though he regarded the moment as critical, that on the decision of the man before him lay vital issues.

Talaat Bey read carefully, going over what was written word by word and line by line, as if with the purpose of discovering some flaw, some mistake.

‘ And you would serve me faithfully ? ’ he said.

'I love not the reign of the Young Turks,' replied Suliman. 'When the great Abdul was dethroned, they promised many things ; they fulfilled none of them. They said that Turkey would be great, but Turkey is weak. They said their rule should be a rule of justice—it is corrupt. They said Turks should be masters in their own house, and they have admitted taskmasters who inflict burdens heavy to be borne. I love not the thought that those who dethroned Abdul should reign, but I am willing to serve, and I never yet betrayed my trust.'

Talaat opened two doors in the compartment and looked outside, as though he suspected listeners. Then he came back to his visitor.

'The times are new,' he said. 'What is past is past, what is written is written. The masters of one generation become the servants of the next. If you come to me, you must forget the blood that flows in your veins ; you must be as faithful as a dog, as obedient as a dog. You must keep open ears, and a still tongue. You must have eyes everywhere ; you must toil not only by day, but by night. You are willing to do this ?'

'Talaat Bey's history is not unknown,' replied the youth, 'and those who seek his service must pay his price, as well as receive his wages.'

'And you will do this ?'

'Else why should I be here ?'

Talaat Bey turned to a table that stood close to where he was, and took from it a copy of the Koran.

'You'll swear on this,' he said, 'that you will do my bidding, that you will be trusty and secret ?'

'No,' replied the youth, 'I will not swear. I have come to you, as it is written there,' and he nodded again to the papers, 'to serve you, and I will serve you as best I may. But this is not the time for oaths upon the Book of Books.'

For a second Talaat Bey hesitated, then he took him towards the window, and looked steadily into his eyes. He examined him feature by feature.

'It shall be as you say,' he said. 'You shall come here, live in my house, and obey my commands. I will speak to you as I speak to myself. But if you fail me, it would be better for you had you never been born. The blood of your ancestors shall not

save you, even as it has not saved those of your forefathers.'

'I am content,' was all the youth said.

'Here,' went on Talaat Bey, 'no one will know who you are, except that you are Suliman, versed in languages, a faithful secretary, and that I trust you.'

'I am content,' repeated the youth.

From that time he was taken into Talaat's Bey house and confidence, and initiated into the work he had to do.

For some time nothing of importance happened, but his master seldom allowed him to be alone. The work he did was mysterious. Letters were written and dispatched secretly; orders were given which seemed to have no meaning. More than once Suliman discovered that the Governor's orders were annulled, and his plans set at naught.

On the tenth day of his residence there, Talaat commanded him to be in the room where they first met, at midnight. Suliman's eyes flashed. It might seem as though something he had long been expecting were coming to pass. Throughout these ten days, when not engaged in his secretarial duties, he had moved quietly about the streets of Erzerum. He had spoken but little, but his eyes had been observant. More than once his servant had followed him, and when they had reached lonely places, this servant had spoken earnestly to his master.

'All is like it was with the Egyptians, when there was the plague of darkness,' said the servant to him on one occasion. 'There are rumours everywhere, but nothing is known. No light falls on the dark places.'

'You have kept your ears open, Yusef?'

'Always.'

'And there are no suspicions about me?'

'None, master. But I fear for the future.'

'All is safe yet. It seems as though Providence interposed on our behalf. There was but one chance in a thousand that the convent priest should have discovered what he did. Yet that discovery has made everything possible.'

'But you walk on the edge of a sword, master.'

'That is my risk. But have an easy mind, Yusef. It is said that Talaat Bey has never been outwitted; that is why he still rules in Erzerum, although he is no longer Governor.'

At midnight on the day in question Suliman was seated in Talaat Bey's compartment. Scarcely had the hour struck, when the old man entered the room. He laughed as he saw his secretary waiting.

'The Governor comes to me for his orders,' he said, with pride.

Suliman's face was impassive, not a muscle moved.

'To-night,' said Talaat, 'we shall know the fate of Turkey, and the fate of many others.'

He had scarcely spoken, when stealthy footsteps were heard on the stairs, and a man entered the room. He wore a long, loose gown, similar to those worn by dancing dervishes, while the green turban around his head indicated that he had been to Mecca.

When he saw Suliman, he looked at Talaat Bey inquiringly.

'All is well,' was the old Turk's reply.

The newcomer threw off his gown as he spoke, and revealed the attire of a man of high rank.

'I must speak quickly,' he said.

'Why quickly?' asked Talaat.

'Because before a man can count a thousand the Germans will be here.'

A look of intense hatred flashed into Talaat's eyes.

'We have them everywhere,' he cried. 'Turkey is ruled by Germany. Nothing is done without them.'

'We can do nothing without them,' replied the Governor. 'Bulgaria, Servia, Rumania, are gone from us. Not a vestige of our power remains. If we ever win them back, it must be by the help of German swords, German guns, and German money. But enough of that; it is known to you as well as to me. War is decided on.'

'I know it,' replied Talaat.

'In one month, perhaps in one week,' went on the Governor, 'we shall fire upon Russian vessels; Germany has demanded it. I have received orders that every soldier shall be called up. Germany has demanded a million men. And I, as Governor of Erzerum, who have command of all this district, am instructed to work in conjunction with the war authorities, to obtain every available man, from Trebizon to Bagdad, from Beirut to

Urmia. It is beyond me. If it is not carefully worked, we may have revolution; many of the people hate the Germans. It is declared that they, and not we, rule Turkey.

'And is it not true?' said Talaat. 'But what of that? Did not Jesus, the prophet of the Christians, say, "Make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness"? After all, it is only our brains against those of the Germans.'

'Yes, but they are as cunning as the devil, and as cruel as hell,' replied the Governor.

'Then we must destroy them with their own weapons.'

'That's why I come to you,' said the Governor. 'Turkey is a nest of hornets, and if I am not careful they will sting me to death.'

'We must pull out their stings,' said Talaat.

'But how? Orders have come from Constantinople that I am to collect every man of fighting age for the army. Sedition is rife. Men will say that we only fight to give the Germans more power, that we place ourselves more completely in their hands. You know it, Talaat.'

'But the men must be got.'

'Yes, they must be got. Then there is the question of the Armenians,' went on the Governor. 'In the Turkish Empire there are twenty million people, two million of them are Armenians, curse them! It is they who have the wealth of the Empire, not we, and yet they are not liable to compulsory military service. Fancy it! Other countries say we have treated the Armenians badly. In Abdul's days the streets of Constantinople ran with their blood, while a few years ago, in the Adana region, we had to kill thousands.'

Talaat laughed. 'It was a necessary sacrifice,' he said. 'Besides, what would you? What right have Christians in Turkey? Shall they share with the faithful, ay, and have more than their share of the things which Allah has provided for his own people? There will always be the Armenian trouble in Turkey while there are Armenians.'

'Then what shall we do with them?'

Talaat laughed again, a low, cruel laugh. Evidently his busy brain was at work. 'When this war is over,' he said, 'there must be no Armenians in Turkey.'

The Governor rose to his feet impatiently. 'It is well for you to talk, Talaat, but talk does not help.'

'I have done more than talk in my time,' was Talaat's reply, 'I will do more than talk now; but wait a minute, I'm thinking.'

'Think quickly then,' replied the Governor, 'the Germans will soon be here.'

'Did not David place Uriah in the forefront of the battle?' and again the old man laughed.

'Yes, but how can we place the Armenians in the forefront of the battle? According to the Turkish constitution, they cannot be compelled to take military service, and at a time like this we cannot afford a revolution. Many of our people, although they hate the Christian religion, would espouse their cause. You must remember they have power, too, they have a part in our Government.'

Talaat shrugged his shoulders scornfully.

'Listen,' he said, 'we have two enemies—the German and the Armenian—and seemingly we are in the power of both. Germany has trained our armies, found us money to build railways; so far we have used them. But as you say, they are as cunning as the devil, and they rule us. The Armenians have power, because they have grabbed the commerce, the wealth of the Empire. Is not that true?'

'Does not darkness come when the sun goes down?' asked the Governor, and there was anger in his voice. 'What need to answer a child's question?'

'Is it a child's question? It lies at the root of our troubles. We must destroy the Armenians, and we must shake ourselves free from the Germans; ah, but we must use them both first!'

'How can we use them?'

'Pay heed to me,' said Talaat. 'I have lived with the Armenians all my life. I know them root and branch, and I hate them. They have taken even our children's bread and made it their own. They have built cities on our lands; they have amassed our wealth. I have measured them, I have weighed them in the balance, and they shall be found wanting. As for Germany, have I not stood before the great War Lord; have I not met in council with their Imperial Chancellor; have I not measured my

brains against theirs ? And I tell you, I am not afraid of them.'

The man spoke with suppressed power, and the Governor in spite of himself looked at him admiringly.

'I have thought it all out,' said Talaat, 'and I who have worked in the dark, and am but little seen in Constantinople, will do more to save our land for the children of Allah than those who sit in high places. But we know our problem ; we must use both Armenians and Germans as our tools. We must make ourselves fat by their wealth.'

'And then ?'

'The one we must destroy, and the other we must throw from our backs, even as Sindbad threw from his back the Old Man of the Sea. We must use both the men and the money of Armenia, and we must do it quickly. The conscription must be for all, and the Armenian young men must become soldiers willingly.'

'But how can you make them do it ?'

'In three days from now,' went on Talaat, "the Dashnaktzoutian party, which, to our sorrow, is the chief Armenian parliamentary group in the Ottoman Empire, will meet here at Erzerum. We will send envoys to that party, and we will promise them great things. We will tell them that if they can make a common cause with the Ottoman Government, in prosecuting the war, if they will raise bands of Armenian volunteers, we will give them as a reward Russian Caucasia, which we will wrest from the Russians. We will also tell them that they shall have large powers of government of the provinces of Bitlis and Van, indeed we will promise them a large zone, which they can call their own, of course under Ottoman suzerainty. It is what they have wanted. They boast of their ancient race ; now we will flatter them. Is not Australia, is not Canada, under British rule ? Yet the Canadians and the Australians rule these countries as their own. We will tell them that they shall have the same privileges in Turkey. They will jump at it, like a hungry dog jumps at a bone.'

'But shall we fulfil it ?' asked the Governor.

Talaat laughed. 'When the war is over, cannot conditions be found whereby, because they have been traitors, they shall be destroyed ?'

'But you cannot destroy two million people. All Europe

would be upon us. Even the Germans would not stand that.'

'Germany will stand anything, do anything, for gain,' replied Talaat. 'But I have my plans for that, too. Hark ! is not that the step of a stranger ?'

'Talaat, you are inspired of Allah !' said the Governor.

'Allah is great,' said Talaat with a low laugh.

'The wisdom of Solomon hath descended upon you, and I trust *you*, to beat even the Germans.'

Talaat laughed again. He spread out his hands ingratiatingly.

'What would you ?' he said. 'I have it all here,' tapping his forehead. 'But I hear strange steps, and there is some one coming.'

A minute later, three men, European in attire, were admitted into the room. Their nationality was so plainly written upon their faces, that they had no need to speak to reveal the fact that they were Germans.

CHAPTER XI

THE GERMAN PLAN

THE three Europeans entered quietly; but no sooner did the Governor see their faces than a look of excitement, almost amounting to fear, came into his eyes. Even Talaat Bey bowed a shade lower than was his custom on meeting strangers, for one of them was no less a person than the German Ambassador in Constantinople. Another was the German Consul at Erzerum, while the third was a man whose name will go down to history as having out-rivalled Herod of olden time. Up to that time, however, he had only been known as Dr. Rohrbach, of Berlin, the central European expert in the geography of racial ascendancy and racial repression.

Evidently the Germans had expected to find Talaat Bey and the Governor there, but each cast swift and suspicious glances towards young Suliman, who sat impassive at a table as if he were taking notes.

'What we have to say must be said in secret,' said the Ambassador with a touch of impatience in his voice.

'Nothing that is said will go beyond the walls of this room, except with your excellency's permission,' replied Talaat. 'This young man, the sharer of my most secret thoughts, is the son of one who was one of my dearest friends. He is as trusty as death: of that I have made many proofs. But I am an ignorant man, and I know but little of your language. This youth is a good youth, and the tongues of the West are known to him: that is why, when words are obscure, I need him to make them plain to me. But his tongue would cleave to the roof of his mouth, and his right hand would wither, before he would betray

aught that would injure the children of Allah or their friends.'

Suliman's face was perfectly impassive while Talaat spoke. One would have imagined that he did not know they were speaking about him.

'Punishment will fall upon you if we are betrayed,' said the Ambassador. 'I, with Dr. Rohrbach, have come from Constantinople on no light mission. The future of your Empire hangs in the balance. If Germany takes her protecting hand from Turkey, it is doomed.'

'Ah!' said Talaat, 'we know we bask in the smile of your excellency, and we look upon your great country as our saviour. We work for common ends, do we not?'

'Yes,' replied the Ambassador, 'and I have come from Constantinople to advise you in the difficult work you have to do.'

'We welcome your advice, even as a fading flower welcomes the dew,' said Talaat, and his eyes glittered as the eyes of a serpent glitters when it is about to spring upon its prey. But his voice was oily and obsequious.

'You know,' went on the Ambassador, 'that the Turkish Government has decided to join us in this war?'

The other two nodded in assent.

'Such a war was never known before,' went on the German, 'such a war will never be known again. In the West we are on our way to victory. In a few weeks France and Belgium will be crying for peace, while England—it is a rope of sand! Their contemptible little army has fled before our legions.'

'Allah is great,' said Talaat.

'But much remains to be done in the East,' went on the German. 'When France and Belgium are crushed, there still remains England's navy. It may be, too, that we have not altogether estimated their strength aright. Still, we have made all preparations. When they are powerless in the West, we shall withdraw our armies from there, and bring them eastward. Then will come Turkey's opportunity. If she is faithful, she will be our ally indeed, and great will be her reward.'

Talaat's eyes glittered, but he spoke no word.

'Russia has innumerable hordes of men,' went on the German, 'therefore we shall need all the help which Turkey can give.'

'But if your excellency's plans are frustrated?' said Talaat.

' It is well to consider every contingency. Suppose England with her great might resists your armies ? Suppose you cannot crush France ? '

' That cannot be ; everything has been calculated to the minutest detail. We have made a time-table. Before the autumn leaves have fallen, all will be done according to our plans.'

' The Balkan States ? ' and there was almost a wheedling tone in his voice.

' We hold the Balkan States in the hollow of our hands,' replied the German. ' The Emperor has been careful to marry the kings of these countries to German princesses. Thus Greece, Bulgaria, Rumania are but pawns on the chessboard.'

The Turk's eyes glittered. ' Our people have bitter memories,' he suggested.

' At best the Balkan States are but hornets' nests,' replied the German. ' The true Turkish Empire lies east and south-east. With our help, much of the Caucasus will fall into your hands. With our help, Egypt shall become your own. But that is settled. These things have been carefully dealt with in Constantinople and Berlin. Our trouble now is here in Asia Minor. There seems to be much plotting and sedition here, and we want every available man. I find, too, that the riches of your land are in the hands of aliens. This needs attention.'

' Your excellency means the Armenians ? ' said the Governor.

' Turkey will ever be poor while the Armenians suck her life-blood as if they were so many vampires,' said the German.

' Until the Armenian question is settled, there can be no prosperity ; and yet they must be used in this war. It is a difficult problem, and that is why I have been sent to you, who have dug deep into the heart of this question,' and the German bowed towards Talaat Bey as he spoke.

' It is like the shining of the sun on a dark day, to hear your excellency speak so kindly of my little knowledge,' replied Talaat. ' Yes, I have given this question much thought. I was told many days ago that our Government would declare war against your enemies, and I have seen your needs, and I have formed my plans upon those needs.'

' What are they ? ' asked the Germans.

Whereupon Talaat outlined his plan for bribing the Arme-

nians in order to raise Armenian volunteers to fight by the side of the German armies.

The Ambassador nodded significantly to his compatriots when Talaat Bey had concluded. The idea seemed to please him well.

'Naturally when the terms come to be fulfilled,' he said, 'you will find excellent reasons for making other plans?'

'When a horse has carried you throughout your journey, and is exhausted with its labours, you pay but little attention to the condition of the horse, especially if it is worthless. If you can, you sell it.'

The three Germans nodded.

'No wonder you are regarded as of so much importance in the vilayet of Erzerum,' said the Ambassador.

'There is not a province in the whole of the Asia Minor but where Talaat Bey's word is listened to even as if he were the great Prophet come to life,' said the Governor.

'Still,' said the Ambassador doubtfully, 'we are counting our chickens before the eggs are hatched. Suppose this Armenian Parliament declines your proposal; suppose they refuse to fight for Turkey?'

Talaat Bey laughed.

'When the Prophet of olden time wanted men,' he said, 'he got them. If they disobeyed, they were never able to disobey again.'

'Then you have plans for dealing with them, if they do not comply with your wishes?'

'Every archer has more than one string to his bow.'

'But think,' said the German, 'supposing you use conscription, and force every Armenian to fight with the Turkish Army. A forced army is a weakness; you will have traitors by the thousand, and traitors breed like vermin. Remember this, too, we are fighting with Russia, and the Armenians in the Russian Caucasus have rushed eagerly to the Russian standard. Will the Armenians fight their brothers in the faith? Remember, there are two millions of them in your Empire, and when one man in ten is an enemy, nothing is safe.'

'When a dog's teeth are drawn, he cannot bite,' was Talaat's reply.

'But can you draw the teeth of two million dogs?' said the German.

'The house of every Armenian in Asia Minor can be entered,' said Talaat, 'and all weapons can be taken away from them.'

'That may be difficult,' said the German; 'at a time like this you cannot afford a revolution.'

'The great Abdul Hamid made short work of them twenty years ago,' replied Talaat, 'could not that be repeated?'

The German shook his head.

'After all Abdul did, there are still two million Armenians in the Empire,' he said.

'Every dog of an Armenian must be put to the sword,' said Talaat.

The Germans looked unconvinced.

'When the great Prophet Mohammed proclaimed the faith his cry was, "Death or Conversion!"' went on the old Turk. 'For the safety of the Empire, the same law can be put into force. In every country those who are guilty of treason die.'

'But,' said the German, 'conversion may not be easy. For more than a thousand years the Armenians have stood out against those who would destroy them; they have remained true to their religion. Will not history repeat itself?'

'Ah!' replied Talaat Bey fiercely, 'you speak as a Christian. You know not the only true religion. What though there are two million Armenian graves in Turkey! Would it not be pleasing to Allah? Besides, let the women and children be faced with the alternative of death or acceptance of the faith, and they will choose the faith.'

'Then your plan is, if they refuse to obey the will of the Turkish Government, to put every man, woman, and child to the sword?'

'The rivers of Armenia shall be made red with their blood,' was the old Turk's reply.

Again the German shook his head.

'That will do not,' he said. 'It will arouse the enmity of America, and we should indeed have the world against us. Oh, no. What is done must be for the good of the Armenians.'

'The good of the Armenians?' snarled Talaat, 'the good of our enemies? the good of the poisonous dogs who would bite us? the good of the snakes who would sting us? the good of those who have grown rich while we remained poor? the good

of the followers of the Galilean carpenter? Then, indeed, we might write Ichabod on the gates of our cities!

'Your excellency has taken my words literally,' said the German.

'Ah!' the old Turk's eyes glittered. 'Forgive me that I doubted your wisdom. Forgive me for thinking that, although you profess to follow the prophet of the Christians, you have not the spirit of those who have the true faith. Doubtless your greatness has a plan to propose.'

'My friend here,' said the German, turning to the man who had been spoken of as Dr. Rohrbach, 'has drunk deeply of the wisdom of your country, and he has prepared a plan which promises well.'

Talaat gave no reply, but turned his eyes towards Dr. Rohrbach.

'Will my lord speak?' he said.

The German doctor hesitated, as though he had difficulty in finding words to express his thoughts.

'What I have to say,' he said presently, 'is not in contradiction to the great Talaat Bey's wisdom. I would simply apply that wisdom.'

'Speak on,' said Talaat Bey.

'I agree with your policy,' said the doctor, 'and doubtless you will have Armenian troubles while you have Armenians. Yet in a crisis like this you want to use them. Now if the Armenian section of your Parliament decides that the young men of their race join the Turkish Army willingly, it is well: you must use them. When the war is over, then, as you say, you get rid of the horse that has carried you throughout your journey.'

'But how?'

'You come back to the same question. Supposing this Parliament decides against joining them, they will do so because they are traitors, and still the same difficulty faces you. Disarm them, by all means. Take away from them every weapon of defence. Let no sword or pistol or rifle be found in any Armenian dwelling. But that is not enough.'

'No,' snarled Talaat, 'it is not enough. They are still in our country, they still eat our children's bread, they still live on our land; they still have power, and they might go in hordes to the North and help the Russians.'

'Exactly,' said the doctor. 'And yet the methods which you

worked successfully in the time of the Great Prophet cannot be used to-day. As I said, we must seemingly act for the Armenians' good.'

The old Turk showed his yellow teeth. '*Seemingly!*' he snarled. 'The word is good. But will my lord speak further, and illumine the darkness?'

'Have we not been told,' went on Dr. Rohrbach, 'that the enterprise, the power to make a desert bloom and blossom as the rose, lies with the Armenians? Have they not boasted of it? Very well. Are there not vast tracts of land down beside the Euphrates, which are declared to be rich, and which yet yield nothing, because they are uncultivated? Is not the whole land of Mesopotamia sterile through want of willing workers? Yet the river Euphrates runs through it.'

The old Turk laughed scornfully. 'It is as bare as an egg,' he snarled, 'not a blade of grass grows. Even those who are born there die like flies for want of nourishment.'

'Ah!' was the doctor's reply, 'but could it not be told to the world that because of the great river, all the wastes of Mesopotamia could be made rich? Now listen. Your Government will declare war on Russia and on England, especially on England. Could it not be said that the Armenians sympathize with their brothers of the North? Therefore much feeling will be aroused against them by the faithful. As a consequence, the Turkish Government, in its kindness for the Armenians, and in its desire to protect them from the natural anger of the faithful, will remove them to this land which flows with milk and honey. This will not be massacre. It will not be the shedding of blood; it will be taking them to a place of safety.'

Talaat Bey laughed almost gleefully. 'It is a great plan,' he said, 'forgive my doubting your excellency's wisdom. Even I had not thought of such a thing. It is worthy of the Prophet himself. Will your excellency allow me a little time for thought, so that my mind may encompass this scheme?'

For a time there was silence in the room, while old Talaat Bey seemed like a man staring into vacancy. Then his eyes assumed the glitter common to them.

'The Armenians are rich,' he said, 'they have much goods. They will wish to take their riches with them.'

'That, of course, would be impossible,' said Dr. Rohrbach. 'But could not the Turkish Goverment take care of these goods, while they are away? Remember,' he went on, 'it must not go out that they are deported for all time, but only for a few weeks, or months, as the case may be, until the trouble is over. Then they shall return to claim their own. The beneficent Turkish Government will go through a form of promising to take care of all their possessions.'

Again the old Turk laughed. 'And they will never return,' he said. 'Once, when I was a youth, I travelled to Ana, and Abas, and Abu Rayan. Once they get there, they will never return; they will die like flies in the snow.'

'In which case,' said the German, 'your country is free from them for ever. And because they do not return, the faithful will have their wealth.'

'I will make a confession to your excellencies,' said the old Turk. 'In my foolishness I dreamed that for cunning, for subtlety, and for cruelty, the Turks were masters of the world. I thought, when I spoke of a great slaughter of all these children of Tophet, I had gone to the extreme edge of what you Christians call cruelty and savagery; but I bow the knee to you Germans as my masters. My poor brain could not have conceived of such a plan. It is not simply great, it is sublime. Under the guise of kindness, it will fulfil our purposes. In the name of humanity, Herod, King of the Jews, was but a puling child in arms compared with you.'

'Then you think this plan can be worked?' asked the German.

'It will be difficult, but it is possible,' said Talaat. 'Every government and every province of our land must be told of this great thing. Oh, I bow my knee to my lords! Two million Armenian dogs sent to a slow, lingering death, in the name of mercy, pity, and humanity! Do not mothers send their children to a safe place when there is a deadly fever in the house? So we send these dear children to a land of Goshen, that they may be at peace, and in prosperity, while the sons of the faithful are at war.'

The old Turk laughed gleefully as he spoke. His eyes shone with a savage joy.

The Germans looked at each other uncomfortably. It would

seem as though the old Turk had made them ashamed of themselves.

'But,' said the German, 'our plans must not be shouted from the housetops ; indeed, we hope it will not be necessary to do these things. If the Armenians are amenable to reason, they would, of course, continue to live under the present conditions. Not a word must be said until our plans are completed, and we must be careful, if we are driven to extremities, that this be published to the world as an act of mercy to the Armenians.'

'Commend me to the children of the prophet of Nazareth for hypocrisy,' said Talaat. 'It is no wonder that my lord's country has become great ; it is no wonder that the commerce of Germany spreads from land to land. Doubtless, too, after this war is over, all the Germans' purposes in making it will be fulfilled.'

'You mistake the purpose of the Germans,' said the Ambassador. 'We simply stand by Austria in chastising the Serbians, especially as Russia has espoused Serbia's cause.'

The old Turk laughed at the others again ; he seemed greatly amused.

'You do not believe me,' said the German. 'We are lovers of peace ; the Emperor longs only for peace ; but we must maintain the rights and liberties of the German people. We have duties to perform ; we must fulfil them. This war is only an expression of our duty.'

'Would it not be well to cast aside cloaks ?' said the old Turk. 'I am an old man now, and I have seen many things in life. I know it is well in what you call your diplomatic talks, to profess desire for peace, and to talk of the brotherhood of men. But for the moment I am in the humour to speak plainly. Why is Germany at war to-day ? That she may gain all she desires. Why shall we declare war ? For the same reason. We hate the Armenians. Why do we try to hide it ? To deceive the world ? Yes. But we mean to remove every Armenian from the face of the world, and you, our friends, help us. My lord is wise in saying we must be secret. All the same, we must act quickly. All the Governors of all the vilayets must be instructed in what they have to do.'

'But they must be dealt with carefully,' broke in the Governor

of Erzerum. ‘This province will be easy to manage, but the southern provinces will be more difficult. The Governor of Van must know at once. A trusty messenger should be sent to him without delay.’

‘But let us understand,’ said the Ambassador, ‘that it is not we Germans who have counselled this.’

‘You are as innocent as babes unborn,’ replied Talaat. ‘When the Christians shudder at what is done, they will say it is the Turks who did these things, as they did them in the time of Abdul. But what then? We can still profess great sorrow, and plead the dire necessity. But great care must be taken.’

‘How can we send to Djevdet Bey?’ asked the Governor. ‘As you know, it is impossible for me to leave Erzerum. Will not my lords,’ and he bowed to the Germans, ‘travel to Van, and make their wills known?’

‘It would not be seemly,’ said the Ambassador; ‘the Turks must govern their own country. We simply make suggestions. One of your own people must do this thing.’

‘Then must we send an envoy to Constantinople, telling the Government to commission some high official for this duty.’

‘That would not be wise,’ said Talaat. ‘It would take much time. What is done must be done quickly.’

He turned to Suliman as he spoke, who had sat the whole time never uttering a word, but writing with great rapidity.

‘Suliman, you can undertake this mission,’ said the old Turk. ‘You can go to Van, you can speak to Djevdet Bey, and explain our will. He hath great power among the other Governors.’

Suliman bowed.

‘When can you start?’

‘In an hour,’ replied Suliman. ‘I am Talaat Bey’s servant. It is for him to command, and for me to obey.’

‘You have understood all that has been said?’

‘Your thoughts have been as clear as the water of a running brook,’ replied the youth.

‘I would speak to you alone before we decide anything,’ said the Ambassador.

Talaat nodded to Suliman, who left the room without a word.

‘It is a difficult task for one so young.’

‘He is wise beyond his years,’ the Turk replied.

'And you vouch for his trustworthiness?"

'As my arm is to my body, so is he faithful to me.'

For a few minutes more they talked together, and then left the house.

The next day, Suliman, accompanied by his servant, as well as three others whom Talaat insisted should go with him, started for Van, to have audience with Djevdet Bey, the Governor of the city.

CHAPTER XII

VICTOR AND DJEVDET BEY

SEATED in the Governor's palace in the city of Van, a man of perhaps forty years of age sat writing. Apparently he was much disturbed. He was a tall man, with loose, sensual lips, and cruel, cunning eyes. His face was large and fleshy, his forehead was receding, although this fact was hidden by the fez which he habitually wore. His gorgeous garments, which revealed the fact that he was of high rank, did not succeed in hiding the real nature of the man.

This was Djevdet Bey, the Governor of the province of Van. From the window of the room in which he sat he could see the great range of rocks, called the Castle Rock, in the near distance. He could also, from another window, see the narrow, dirty street, and the flat-roofed houses of which the town was composed.

During the summer, Van had been as hot as an oven, for, while high above the sea, the great lake was edged around by mountains, which kept away the breezes which would otherwise have cooled it. Especially had the town of Van suffered from great heat during the summer of 1914. So great was it, that even the Turks who had lived there all their lives felt more than ordinarily oppressed. The sickly odour of the street reached even the room where Djevdet Bey sat, while innumerable flies, the outcome of the filth of the town, made life a misery. Gaunt, scrofulous-looking dogs either lay and panted, or lurched around looking with blinking, evil eyes for garbage upon which they could feed.

Presently Djevdet Bey looked up from his paper, and clapped his hands. Instantly a man entered.

' You said just now,' said the Governor, ' that the woman had appealed to the head of the American Mission for help.'

'I spoke the truth, your excellency. The woman made this appeal in secret, but, knowing your desires, she was watched night and day.'

'And what was the reply?'

'That he would speak to the German Consul, your excellency.'

Djevdet Bey laughed. 'That is well,' he said.

'But as I dared to tell your excellency,' went on the man, 'I think that was but a ruse. The woman hath other plans.'

'Do you think she knows where her daughter and the lady Adana Ulah are?' he asked.

'I think she hath discovered. I have found out, too, that she is making preparations as if for another attempt at departure.'

'Let it appear to her as though we are ignorant of this,' said Djevdet Bey. 'Even let her depart, if she will. It will help us. Meanwhile, see that she is watched. That is all.'

The servant left the room, but immediately returned.

'Pardon, your excellency,' he said, 'but a stranger is here who is desirous of seeing you. He says he comes from Talaat Bey.'

'The young Talaat or the old one?'

'From the great Talaat. He comes from Erzerum.'

'Admit him without delay.'

A few seconds later, Suliman entered the room.

'Will my lord pardon me for entering his presence in this state,' said the youth, 'but my business requires haste. And my lord Talaat bade me spare neither horse, nor man, in coming to you quickly.'

Djevdet Bey cast a quick, searching glance at the new-comer. He seemed surprised to see a strange youth, and one who was so young, empowered with what was evidently a message of importance from the great Talaat.

'You have come from Erzerum?' he demanded.

'Night and day have I travelled from Erzerum, without taking rest,' replied the youth.

'Tell me your name, and your degree, and why you have come,' demanded the Governor.

'It is written there,' and Suliman took a packet from his pocket and placed it before the Governor. Then he stood perfectly still, while the other read the missive.

It was couched in Oriental language, which I will not try to reproduce, but stripped of its verbiage, it stated that young Suliman, the bearer of the letter, was known to and trusted by the writer, and that his word could be absolutely relied on. It also asserted that he was true to the faith, and ready to die for the children of the Faithful.

'How long have you been the secretary of Talaat Bey?' inquired the Governor.

'But a little while,' replied the youth.

'What were you, and where did you live, before you went to Erzerum?'

'His excellency Talaat Bey told me he had informed you of all that he desired you to know about myself.' And his face was perfectly expressionless as he spoke.

'You come to me on a matter of importance,' said the Governor, after having given another suspicious glance at his visitor.

'So important that it could not be written,' replied the youth. 'So important that had aught happened to me on the way, your excellency would not have heard the news that will change the face of the Ottoman Empire. Pardon, excellency, but you seem to doubt me. If I were not to be trusted, Talaat Bey, whose wisdom has never been doubted, would not have entrusted me with such a mission.'

'True,' said the Governor, glancing at the letter which he had just read. 'But the country is riddled with enemies; spies are abroad, and treason is common. What is it you have to tell me?'

'Your excellency knows that the Turkish Government has decided to go to war on the side of Germany?'

'Is that official?'

Suliman bowed. 'It is official, my lord. But as yet it is not given out to the world. While I was in Talaat Bey's house, the Governor of Erzerum being present, there came three Germans, two from Constantinople, and one the German Consul at Erzerum. It is concerning their visit that I come to speak to my lord.'

'The Germans, the Germans, always the Germans!' and Djevdet Bey spoke savagely. 'Still, we have used them. They have provided us with money, they have trained our armies. When they have done our work, we must be rid of them.'

He spoke like a man talking to himself. Then to Suliman he went on, 'Spoke they with authority? What was their business?'

'May I urge caution?' whispered Suliman, looking round the room. 'Will your excellency forgive me if I take precautions that no one is listening? The eyes of the world are always upon the great, and every word which falls from your excellency's lips is doubtless treasured by enemies as well as by friends.'

He went to the door as he spoke, and looked into the passage. So suddenly did he go, that the man who had admitted him, and who was listening at the door, was not able to escape before he was seen. The Governor laughed as he saw him.

'Ahmet,' he said, 'you will answer for this.'

The man slunk away. Evidently he feared the Governor's words.

'You can speak on now,' said the Governor, 'Ahmet will not listen again.'

'I wanted to take precautions,' said Suliman, 'because I have been told there are many Armenians in Van, and it is of them I would speak.'

There was a strange look in the Governor's eyes as Suliman uttered the words, which the young man did not fail to note.

'You love not the Armenians?' said the Governor.

'Are they not followers of the false Prophet?' replied Suliman. 'Have they not lifted the standard of the Cross in Turkey for many centuries? But for them there would be no followers of the Galilean carpenter in all Asia Minor. Still, the daughters of the Armenians are fair, and many of them, even yet, have much wealth, and it is said in Erzerum that even my lord the Governor of Van hath cast his eyes in love upon the daughters of the Armenians.'

'Tell me what you mean; speak not in riddles,' commanded the Governor.

'Forgive me, my lord, it is not for me to speak of such things, until I have first fulfilled my mission. If, after that, I can be of service to my lord, he has only to command me.' And he looked meaningfully into the eyes of the other.

'Yes,' replied the other, 'but you must have some purpose in speaking thus.'

'It is said that two who are very fair,' said Suliman, 'have, in spite of all my lord's powers, escaped from him, and that in spite of all his endeavours he has not been able to find them. What if I have learned how to help my lord? But I will not speak of that now; I will say the things I have come to say. Afterwards, it may be that even I can help one who is greater than even in my wildest thoughts I can ever hope to be.'

'You seem prudent and well-spoken,' said the Governor, looking eagerly toward the other. 'You have learnt something. But we will talk of that afterwards.'

'Have I not always regarded Djevdet Bey as a prince among the Governors of the provinces?' replied Suliman. 'Is he not the greatest among all the Governors in the East? Therefore, if I can serve him, it may be that he will serve me.'

'If you have knowledge of where they are,' said Djevdet Bey, evidently forgetting the mission upon which his visitor had come, 'if you can reveal to me their hiding-place, if you can take them to a place whereof I can tell you, you cannot ask too much.'

'As I came through Bitlis,' said Suliman, 'it was whispered that a stranger from afar had outwitted my lord and my lord's servants. What if Allah had put in my hands information whereby I can find this stranger? But I must not speak of this now. When I have fulfilled my mission, then questions can be asked of me.'

Again Djevdet Bey looked as though he would rather have continued to talk of these things than of affairs of State. But he nodded to Suliman, and said, 'Yes, tell me of the things which Talaat Bey sent you to reveal to me.'

Five minutes later the Governor had forgotten his own private desires, in the revelations which were made to him. Like Talaat Bey, he was overwhelmed with admiration of Dr. Rohrbach's plan.

'No greater scheme has been known in the history of Turkey!' he cried. 'In the past, all other endeavours to destroy the Armenians have been crude and partial. We have killed a few thousands, and we have roused the indignation of the world. But this, it is stupendous!'

More than once he laughed aloud, as Suliman unfolded the

German's plan. He was carried away by its subtlety ; he rejoiced in its cruelty.

' But it must not be made known yet,' said Suliman. ' All were very insistent on that. If the Dashnaktzoutian Conference decide in favour of the Armenians throwing themselves heart and soul into our plans, then we stay our hands.'

' But only for a time ! ' cried the Governor. ' Surely it is not the will of the Government in Constantinople that the Northern Caucasus, which we shall take from Russia, as well as Bitlis and Van, shall be conceded to these Armenian dogs, even although under Turkish suzerainty ? '

' You know the Government better than I,' replied Suliman. ' You know the mind of Talaat Bey. You know the mind of the Germans. You have penetrated into their secret desires.'

' But what do you think yourself ? ' asked the Governor. ' You are a wise and wary youth. Your wisdom is wondrous for one so young.'

' My words can only be foolishness to such as you,' said Suliman, ' and I can only tell you of certain doubts that have come into my mind.'

' What are they ? ' asked the Turk.

' Suppose,' said Suliman, ' that all the Armenians are driven out of Turkey ; suppose that all their wealth is confiscated to the faithful, do you think the faithful will be the only ones who will benefit ? '

' How can there be any other ? ' replied the Governor.

' Are not the Germans seeking to possess the trade of Turkey ? It is true that the children of the faithful have remained poor, while the Armenians have grown rich, still, say what we will, what wealth Turkey has, is largely because of them. They are the bankers, the doctors, the merchants, the scholars of the Empire. But do you believe that the Germans think only of the good of the Turks, in driving out the Armenians ? Do not they themselves desire to possess what the Armenians have obtained ? Forgive me, for doubtless my words are foolish ; but would not Turkey be a thousand times worse if the Germans had all their wealth and all their power ? '

The youth spoke as though he were afraid. For the first time hesitancy was noticeable in his manner.

'Suppose,' he went on, 'that instead of two million Armenians owning, as you say, the good things of the land of the faithful, they were replaced by as many Germans, backed up by all the power of the German Empire: would Turkey be richer than she is to-day? Is not Germany pretending to help us, that she may extend her powers?'

'Then what would you advise?'

'It is not for such as I to advise,' replied Suliman. 'I only speak to you who are great, and have much power, of the doubts that come into my mind. You have influence in Constantinople. Have they thought of these things there?'

'There is much in what you say,' said the Governor, 'but what can we do? The Armenians are an accursed race, and while they are with us, they will ever be a thorn in our sides. No, no. I will back our cunning and our wit against that of the Germans. And when they have done our work, we shall know how to deal with them. Let them build our railways, and bring money into our land. As for their plans for getting rid of these dogs of Armenians, they are good, they are great! All our so-called cruelty is but child's play to that of the Germans; but trust the Turks to match them when our time comes.'

Suliman seemed on the point of speaking further, but checked himself, while the other went on.

'Yes, it is a great scheme, and must be carried out quickly, silently, effectually. I will see to it that all the Governors know what they have to do. I will make my preparations. And now,' he continued, 'tell me what you meant by the words you uttered concerning the eyes of love which I cast upon two Armenian women.'

Suliman looked thoughtfully out of the window, where he could see the great Castle Rock, and the flat roofs of the houses of the town. He seemed to be listening to the cries of those who were selling their wares in the streets.

'What I have heard,' he said, 'is fragmentary. It may be that I have been misinformed. If your lordship would but tell me the whole facts of the case, then I should know whether I have heard truth or lies. This I have heard: there has been one who has been clever enough to thwart your lordship's schemes.'

'How did you learn this?' asked the Governor suspiciously.
'How has that which has been hidden from me come to you? I have had spies everywhere, I have sought persistently, I have used a hundred means whereby I could discover that which I desired, but in vain. Only to-day has news come to me which may be true, which may be false. Tell me what you know, and then shall I be able to put a true value upon your words.'

'My lord,' said Suliman, 'did Talaat Bey, in his letter to you, inform you that I have a knowledge of the languages of the West?'

'Yes,' said the other. 'He said you were learned in these things.'

'When I was in Mush,' went on Suliman, 'I stayed at an hotel where people of all nations gathered, and I heard one, a stranger, speaking in English. He did not think any one was near who knew that tongue; that was why he spoke freely. I gathered scraps of his conversation, from which I learnt that he had outwitted you. I judged that he was an Englishman, and that he was in some way related to one Urmia Erzinghan, and that he had succeeded in waylaying those into whose care you had given two Armenian maidens, had fought them, and had taken them to a place of safety.'

'But where?' asked the Governor.

'That I did not hear him say. But I should know him again, and perchance I could find him. If war is declared against England, as it soon will be, he can be taken prisoner. In prison he can be made to tell anything, else what are instruments of torture for?'

'Tell me his exact words,' cried the Governor.

'As I said before,' replied Suliman, 'I have only heard fragments of sentences, and I had to piece them together as best I could. Perchance, if you know aught of this, and tell me, even I, poor and obscure, could render assistance. I know English, and with a knowledge of that tongue I might be able to help you. But with the information I have, I could do but little.'

The Governor turned to Talaat's Bey's letter, and read it carefully. Evidently it removed the last shred of doubt, for a look of decision came into his eyes.

"I will speak freely," he said, 'I will trust you, even as Talaat

Bey said I might. As you know, there are many Armenians who live in Van. May the curse of the Prophet be upon them ! They own much wealth here, and although the land is ours, they have power. Two years ago, I saw a maiden in the streets, who was fair as a lily, and beautiful as the virgins in Paradise, concerning whom the great Prophet spoke. The fires of love burnt in my heart, and I determined to possess her for my own. I made inquiries about her, and found that she was the daughter of the sister of Ibram Alexandropol, who at one time was great among the Armenians, and who fled to England. I found, too, that another maiden lived at the house of this widow, and that they had much wealth in Van.

'I have not yet passed the age of love, and both were dear to me. I sought means to have them, but, as I said, the Armenians have yet much power in Van. The Americans have what they call a Presbyterian Mission here, and we have been commanded to pay the Americans much respect. The heads of the Mission threw their protecting hand over these two maidens. Still, I do not despair of having my heart's desires fulfilled. I so worked upon their fears, that the heads of the American Mission told the widow Erzinghan that it would be well if these two maidens could be sent out of Van. So I bribed an Armenian priest, who was false to his faith, to pretend to take them to one of their convents, and then I arranged to put some of my own people to waylay and take them to a house of my own. But my plans were frustrated. A party of strange men pounced upon the priest, and took them away, where, I know not, of a certainty. No light has come to me.'

'Now then comes the strange part of my story. Achma el Amad came to Van soon after, and he told me of one who came to Aleppo, professing to be an Englishman, but who was really the son of Ibram Alexandropol, who had come to Turkey to render help to his father's sister, and to stir up rebellion among the Armenians. Achma, who holds an important position in Aleppo, had received news of this same youth, and had sought to encompass him, but he was helped in Aleppo by an Englishman, who afterwards brought about his escape. Whither he went, it was unknown. But my spies tell me that he made his way through this country, and that it was he who rescued the

two maidens on whom I had cast eyes of love, and took them, whither, I know not.'

'And is this Achma faithful to you?' asked Suliman.

'He obeys me like a dog,' replied the other proudly. 'My brother is Governor of Aleppo, and my brother's mind and my brother's will are my mind and my will. Achma knows that my smile is his fortune, and my frown is his ruin.'

'Perchance,' said Suliman, 'now that I have fulfilled my mission to my lord, I might find this Englishman again, discover all he has done, and thus make known to your excellency where these maidens have been taken. But this would be difficult, and it would take many days.'

'Did not Talaat Bey command you to return to him immediately?' asked Djevdet Bey.

'He said that probably, after I had told you my story, you might find use for my services,' was Suliman's reply.

The Governor of Van again looked at him searchingly. It might seem as though, constantly using spies as he did, he was fearful of being deceived.

'I will tell you of a better way,' he said presently. 'You are young, and you are wise beyond your years. It hath come to me that the mother of Urmia Erzinghan knows where they are in hiding. Could you not go to her, and with craftiness and guile, learn all?'

Suliman's eyes flashed, and he shook his head.

'She would discover that I belonged to the faithful, and her lips would be sealed,' was his reply.

'But could not you, who speak the Western tongues, make it known to her that you were of her faith?' asked the Governor.

At this Suliman spoke angrily. 'Even although I offend your excellency,' he cried, 'even although you cast me into a dungeon for disobeying your will, I will not profess another faith than that which I hold. How could Allah smile upon the doing of one who denied his Prophet?'

Scarcely had he spoken, when Ahmet the servant again appeared. He cringed before his master like a dog who had been whipped, and bent low as if beseeching his forgiveness.

'Will my lord pardon his slave,' he said, 'and remember that I did all because of my faithfulness to his person? Will he

remember that twice I offered my life to save his, and smile upon me once more ?'

'Leave me,' sternly commanded the Governor. 'When I am free to think of you, I will devise means for your punishment. How dare you interrupt when I am discussing affairs of State with an envoy from afar ?'

'Your slave would not have dared,' replied Ahmet, 'but Achma el Amad hath again come to Van, and seeks immediate audience with your excellency's greatness.'

'Achma el Amad !' cried the Governor. 'Again at Van !'

'He declares that he has travelled night and day to bring you great news.'

'Admit him at once,' was the Governor's command.

No sooner had Suliman heard the name of Achma el Amad than a strange fire shot from his eyes, and he clenched his hands like one much wrought upon. But this was only for a moment. Before the Governor could note any change in his expression, his face had grown cold and impulsive.

'Perchance my lord would wish me to go now ?' he said quietly. 'Doubtless he hath affairs of importance to discuss with his visitor.'

The Governor hesitated a moment as if in doubt what to do. Then he said, 'No, remain. It may be that your wisdom, combined with that of Achma, will shed light on that which I wish to know.'

Suliman bowed low.

A minute later, Achma el Amad entered the apartment.

CHAPTER XIII

ACHMA'S SUSPICIONS

AS Achma entered, Suliman gave him a quick glance, and then looked steadily out of the window, as though he were interested in the great Castle Rock which towered above the town. A smile crept to his lips, but his eyes were not free from anxiety. It would seem to a close observer as though he were thinking quickly, and trying to decide upon some plan of action.

The Governor of Van was a vain man, and had placed against the wall of the room a large mirror, which reflected his person clearly in every detail. Suliman looked into the mirror and saw a young man, seemingly of about twenty-five years of age; his rich Turkish attire was stained by travel, his face was tanned a dark brown with exposure to the sun, and he wore a thick, black moustache. On his head was the usual Turkish fez, which almost reached his eyebrows. His appearance was Eastern in every detail, and it seemed to satisfy him. Evidently he had determined what to do.

Meanwhile, Achma made his way across the room to the Governor, and greeted him obsequiously.

'Will your excellency pardon me seeking an audience with you again?' he said, 'but I seek only to serve you. I have of late learnt many things, and although it hath meant many wearisome days of travel, I made speed to come to you.'

'Tell me what you wish to say,' said the Governor.

Achma opened his mouth to speak, and then for the first time seemed to be aware of Suliman's presence. He gave him a quick glance, and went on.

'What I have to say is for your ears only.'

'Does it concern the State, or only myself personally?'

'There are State matters of importance. Also I know of things which touch your excellency's heart. I have come to

tell you how your dearest hopes may be realized, how your love may be satisfied. But it is for your ears only.'

'Doth it affect the young Englishman of whom you spoke when you were here last?' asked the Governor.

'Ay, and closely,' was the reply.

'Then you may speak freely,' replied the Governor. 'This youth who comes to me has been sent by the great Talaat Bey, of Erzerum, whose secrets have been confided to him. He is wise beyond his years. He hath knowledge of the tongues of the West, and he hath even seen this Englishman in Mush.'

Achma looked at Suliman steadily as the Governor spoke, and as he did so, a change came over his face. It might seem as though he were trying to remember something.

Meanwhile, Suliman returned his gaze without moving a muscle, but his face bore a new expression as Achma looked. His eyes seemed to contract. There was a stoop of his shoulders, his chin protruded more than was its wont.

'Methinks I have seen this youth before,' said Achma, as if in vain trying to recall something.

'Know you aught of Achma el Amad?' said the Governor to Suliman.

'Who hath not heard of Achma el Amad?' replied Suliman, bowing profoundly. His voice was low, and he spread out his hands as the words passed his lips. 'Is he not deep in the counsels of the Governor of Aleppo? Is he not a terror to evildoers, and are not his eyes everywhere? Nevertheless, the eyes of Suliman never fell upon him before.'

'His face seems familiar to me,' said Achma. 'But doubtless he is right. I have seen some one like him, but when, and where, does not come to me.'

'As my lord Talaat Bey has informed your excellency,' and Suliman nodded to the letter he had given him, 'this is the first time I have travelled in these regions.'

'He hath doubtless made known to you his birth and parentage?' said Achma, still suspiciously.

'It is all written here,' replied the Governor, laying his hand upon the letter. 'Not only is he deep in the counsels of Talaat Bey, but he is worthy of the confidence placed in him. You may speak freely.'

'Will your excellency pardon me,' said Suliman, 'but I am weary with much travelling, and I would rest. As my lord knows, if I can render him any service, it is for him to command, and me to obey. But if he would allow me, I would seek food, and a bed, during which time Achma el Amad can make known his thoughts to your Excellency. And then, if you think wise, I can wait upon them. For, far be it from me to seek to know his secret thoughts, against his judgment.'

He bowed low as he spoke, and his voice assumed the low, oily accent common to the Turks.

'In six hours from now I will, if my lord wills, come again.'

'It is well,' said the Governor. 'I shall have much to tell you on your return.'

Suliman passed out of the room, and into the courtyard of the Governor's palace, where his servants awaited him. He gave a significant nod to one of them, who followed him closely. They passed down the narrow, dirty street, until they came to the only passable hotel in Van. Here he gave some orders, and was quickly shown into a private apartment.

'Bring me food quickly,' he said, 'for it is many hours since any passed my lips. My servant will wait upon me.'

Preparations for the meal were quickly made, and then after making assurance that he was alone with his servant, he spoke eagerly.

A look of incredulity, followed by one of fear, came into the servant's eyes as he spoke.

'I thought it was he who came,' said the servant, 'but his face was hidden from me, and no one would tell me his name.'

'Did he know you in Aleppo, Yusef?'

'He would pay me no more heed than he paid to the dogs in the street,' replied Yusef, 'I was but a humble menial in Abdul el Hoja's house, and he would know nothing of me. But have you acted wisely, master? If Achma recognized you, we are both dead. Would it not have been wiser of you to have remained, and learnt all?'

'I had to decide quickly,' replied the other. 'Listen. You saw me as I came into Aleppo many months ago. You see me as I am now. Would you recognize me?'

Yusef looked at him steadily. ‘I—I don’t know, master,’ he said doubtfully.

‘I know,’ went on the other, ‘that I am walking on the edge of a sword. But let me tell you my thoughts, and then you will judge whether I acted wisely. You know I went to Talaat Bey, at Erzerum, bearing the papers of the grandson of Abdul? You know how we came by those papers. It was a hard part we had to play, but we played it, because by no other means could I have gained admission into Talaat’s house. Through that admission there, I have learnt many things. Before that, all was hearsay, all was talk. Now I know what the Turkish Government means to do with the Armenian Christians. I have told you.’

‘Yes, master, it was a scheme born in hell.’

‘As you know,’ went on the young man, ‘my one thought has been for the safety of my people.’

‘Ay,’ and Yusef’s eyes flashed, ‘and the safety of the lady Urmia and the lady Anna.’

‘It seemed like Providence,’ went on the master, ‘that Talaat should have chosen me to tell the Governor of Van what his wishes were. Yet, so it was. I found Djevdet Bey eager to talk, free of speech, and wisely managed he revealed much. I have discovered, too, that he does not know of the whereabouts of my cousin. Up to now, they are safe.’

‘Yes,’ replied Yusef, ‘but Achma says he knows, for that is what his words imply. Would it not have been wiser of you to have stayed and learnt all he has to say? Now you will remain in darkness; they will have plans unknown to you.’

‘No,’ replied the other. ‘If he had doubts about me, he would not have spoken freely. And I was not sure about myself. I was not sure that, if I stayed there, and discussed their plans with them, I might not, by some word or action, have made him remember me. If he had remembered me, my life would not have been worth a pin’s purchase.’

‘But how can you learn now?’ said Yusef.

‘When I go back six hours hence, Djevdet Bey will tell me everything.’

‘How do you know?’ asked Yusef.

‘I read him like an open book,’ was the reply. ‘Yusef, bring me that bag, which contains those things I brought from Eng-

land. I have an old photograph of myself, and I want to compare it with what I am now.'

Yusef obeyed, and a minute later Suliman was looking at a photograph taken in London a few months before. He saw a youth dressed in immaculate English clothes, with a smooth, clean-shaven face. It was the portrait of a young Englishman, and no one would have thought of him as anything else.

' That is how I looked when I came to Aleppo, isn't it ? ' he said to Yusef.

' Yes, master. That is how you looked.'

' Does it bear any resemblance to me now ? '

Yusef looked again steadily at the photograph, then at his master. ' The change is wonderful,' he said. ' No, I should not have recognized you. Then, your face was bare, now a thick, heavy moustache hides your mouth, and changes your features. Then, you spoke and looked like an Englishman, now you speak like a Turk, look like a Turk. You wear your clothes just like a Turk wears his. You move your shoulders, you spread out your hands as though you were born in Constantinople.'

The other looked pleased. ' And added to that, Yusef,' he said, ' there is the letter which Talaat Bey wrote to the Governor of Van, telling him of my faithfulness.'

' Yes,' said Yusef. ' I do not think Achma can have recognized you.'

' Then I don't think I have made a mistake. I can meet him now with confidence. I shall have time to think, and prepare my plans. And Djevdet Bey will tell me all that Achma has told him.'

' But why did you refuse to go and see the lady Erzinghan ? ' asked Yusef. ' Surely it would have helped you and her, as well as the ladies Urmia and Adana, if you had taken counsel with her ? '

' If I had fallen in with his suggestion easily, it might have aroused suspicion. How could I, in the character of a descendant of Mohammed, freely hold intercourse with an Armenian woman ? But it is not too late. I can presently, under protest, in my desire to fall in with his wishes, do that also.'

Yusef looked at his master admiringly. ' You are wonderful,' he said ; ' you will do much to save my people.'

The young man took a turn across the room. 'I am walking on the edge of a precipice,' he said. 'If I make one false step, all that I hope to do will become impossible. This scheme of the Germans is ghastly, ghastly beyond words, and I am powerless to stop it. If it is carried out! But I will not think of that yet. . . . Yusef,' he went on, 'tell me again your impression of the lady Urmia's mother. Is she to be trusted? That is, does she talk freely, foolishly, or is she wise, and does she keep her own counsel? You see, I trust your judgment a great deal. Because I must see her; even if I do not fall in with the Governor's suggestion I must speak with her. Do you think she would tell any one of my visit? Would she make my work more difficult?'

'No,' said Yusef. 'I am sure the lady Urmia Erzinghan can be trusted completely.'

Still the young man continued his promenade up and down the room.

'I hate this playing of parts, these subterfuges,' he said angrily. 'I am acting the spy, and I know it. I am using the weapons of which the Turks are past masters, yet in no other way can I accomplish my purposes. I have to match my wits against theirs. In no other way can I learn what I want to learn. But I must do it, for my people's sake.'

He scribbled a few hasty lines, which he gave to Yusef.

'That must be taken to the lady Erzinghan,' he said. 'No one must see you deliver it. No one must know you have gone there.'

'I understand, master,' said Yusef, his eyes glowing with pride at his master's trust. 'But it is many hours since you have had sleep, you will be worn out. Ah, here comes the food!'

'I shall sleep if I can,' and he spoke wearily, 'for I shall need a clear brain. I feel sure that in a few hours Djevdet Bey will send for me.'

Evidently he judged the character of the Governor of Van correctly, for a few hours later a messenger came to him with a summons from the man whose word was practically law throughout the whole province of Van. He smiled as he read the summons. Evidently he had had some sleep, for he looked refreshed and vigorous. There was an eager look in his eyes,

too, as though he enjoyed the thought of what lay before him.

'This is what the Americans call a stiff proposition,' he said to himself. 'If Achma has aroused any suspicions in his mind about me, I shall have my work cut out; and if he has not, if he still trusts me, the position is just as difficult. But here goes.'

Had Achma seen him at that moment, he would have remembered where he had seen him, for, in spite of his heavy moustache and his Eastern attire, he had the look of an English boy.

Nevertheless, when he made his way out of the hotel, his appearance had so changed that no one had a suspicion that he had not had an Eastern upbringing.

When Suliman returned to the Governor's house, he found Djevdet Bey alone, but much excited.

'I can only give you a short time,' he said. 'War is declared.'

'With England,' asked Suliman eagerly.

'No, not yet. That is but a matter of time. But we have fired upon Russian vessels, and all friendly relations between Turkey and Russia have come to an end. The mobilization of our army is not complete, but within three days every man will be under arms.'

'This was, of course, to be expected, after what I told you,' replied Suliman calmly.

'I have sent out orders to all the Governors of all the provinces,' went on Djevdet Bey. 'They will act quickly and in secret. Look you, Suliman, you who know the West, do you believe Germany is so great and powerful as the Germans make themselves out to be?'

'Doubtless they have great armies, and have been preparing for many years,' replied Suliman. 'But France is not the France of 1870.'

'There are reports, reports which must not be known here, which say that the French and the English have driven the Germans armies back; that the Germans have not taken Paris, neither can they get to Calais.'

Suliman's eyes flashed. 'The history of England is great reading,' he said. 'The Englishman is slow to move, but when once moved, he is terrible.'

'Do you not believe, then, that Germany will conquer England and France?'

'Allah is great,' said Suliman, 'and is He not always on the side of the right? Does Germany care aught for honour?'

'Honour!' retorted the Governor. 'What have we to do with honour? We have to think only of the faithful. We have put our hand to the plough now, and we must not turn back. Our only hope lies in Germany. If ever we are to have power again in the Balkan States, if ever we are to put our hand in power on Egypt, it must be with the Germans' help; therefore we fight. As for Russia, we have an old quarrel with her. Besides, the Armenians have joined the Russian standards by thousands. We shall march to the Caucasus at once, and we shall conquer much territory there.'

'Is that the plan?' asked Suliman, and there was a note of eagerness in his voice.

'Yes. It is a secret, and must be kept secret. We shall send a great army to the Caucasus. But it is not of that that I have to speak to you just now. It is concerning other things. Talaat Bey says you are faithful, and he hath given you permission to stay here and obey my commands. You are young, and your life is before you. If you carry out my purposes, I will make you great, and you shall have in me a friend who will protect you always.'

'Then must I strive greatly to please you,' said Suliman.

'You know my wishes,' went on the Governor. 'My heart burns hot for those two Armenian maidens. Now then, listen carefully. As you said, the young Englishman, the son of Ibram Alexandropol, hath come to Asia Minor, and he took them away from those I trusted. He took them to a lonely convent among the Estian Hills. Achma el Amad discovered that. But they are gone from there.'

'Gone!' and Suliman's voice quivered with excitement.

'Ay, gone. But do not let that dismay you. I know where they are.'

'Where?'

'They fled to the house of an Armenian near the village of Nazak. This Armenian hath great power in the district. In two weeks from now the life of no Armenian will be safe; but it is my will that those two women be rescued, that they be taken to a house belonging to me, at Akhla, on the northern shores of the

lake. You understand ? When you have taken them there, and if no harm happens to them, I will make you rich beyond the dreams of Alnaschar. But if you fail me, wherever you go you will not escape my wrath, for every man who kindles the heart of Djevdet Bey in anger suffers the torments of the damned. Will you be faithful ?'

'I serve no man,' said Suliman, 'even although he is as great as Djevdet Bey, for fear of punishment, or because I tremble at his anger. Write down the name of the man into whose house the women are gone, and the location of the house to which I am to take them, and trust me.'

The Governor seized a pen, and wrote rapidly, after which he spoke eagerly for some time concerning his wishes.

'Remember,' he said, 'you must be as silent as the falling dew, as secret as the stars which shine by night, and as swift as the eagle which flies over the mountain tops. Here is all the money you need. You must depart before sunrise to-morrow. If you do not reach them quickly, they will have fallen a prey to the plans of the Government, and I shall be robbed of my desire.'

Suliman bowed, and prepared to leave.

'Stay but another moment,' said the Governor. 'Are you sure Achma el Amad is unknown to you ?'

'How can he be known to me ? Achma is of the south, and I come to you from the north.'

'Still, beware. He has evil thoughts concerning you ; I have read it in his face, his eyes.'

'Said he aught of me ?' asked Suliman.

'No, but when your name was mentioned, there was a look in his eyes which told me many things. I have known him for years, and it seemed to me that he had suspicions of you.'

Suliman shrugged his shoulders carelessly. 'He is naught to me,' he said.

A few minutes later he was wending his way to the Armenian quarter of the city.

CHAPTER XIV

MOMENTOUS DECISIONS

VICTOR found himself in a richly furnished room. Carpets, curtains, upholstery were all of the costliest nature. An air of refinement pervaded everything. To the young man it seemed, although nearly everything was Oriental, that the spirit of the West was also there. In a bookcase he saw not only the works of Sir Walter Scott, but those of Victor Hugo and Lamartine. Two lamps threw a mellow light upon every article of furniture. Heavy curtains, closely drawn, covered the windows.

He had scarcely time to notice all this, when he heard whispering voices. Then a woman of from forty to forty-five years of age entered.

Suliman looked at her eagerly. From the fact that she wore no veil, and that she had entered the apartment alone, he knew that she was a Christian, and was probably the mistress of the house.

She came close to him and looked at him eagerly, scanning his face feature by feature, while the young man, almost too astonished to speak, kept silent.

‘Will you take off your fez?’

He obeyed with a laugh. The adventure was becoming pleasant. The danger of half an hour ago was forgotten. So excited was he, that he did not notice that the woman had spoken in English, although with a strong foreign accent.

‘You are my brother’s son,’ she continued, ‘the same eyes, the same forehead, the same chin. And yet you are your mother’s child, too. You are Victor.’

‘And you,’ was the youth’s reply, ‘are my father’s sister.’

Still the woman looked at him intently, her eyes burning with a strange light. Then her lips began to tremble.

Victor had become an English boy again. The sound of the

English language, the sight of English books, the atmosphere of the room, made him forget the part he had been playing.

'I know you have had a jolly rough time, aunt,' he said, 'but I am going to help you.'

She shook her head sadly. 'It seems like only adding one more to the sacrifice; what can you do?'

'Look here,' he said in a boyish way, and he lifted his shoulders as if to throw from himself a heavy incubus by which he had been burdened, 'now that I am here, I can speak freely. You are my father's sister, we are of the same blood. It may be that I can do but little, but I can do something. Anyhow, I am going to have a jolly good shot at it. Come, aunt, don't be down-hearted. I was brought up in the country where people laugh at difficulties, and I am not afraid of these johnnies, if you are.'

The old schoolboy slang came back to him, and he laughed merrily as he spoke.

'But my poor boy,' she said, speaking slowly, for although she spoke English, it was evidently with an effort, 'you don't know this country.'

'I am beginning to know it pretty well,' he laughed, 'and so far I have come up top dog. Oh, I beg your pardon, I see you don't understand me. What I mean is that these Turkish johnnies have not got the better of me yet.'

'But, Victor,' she said, 'you do not know. Spies are everywhere, and you do not know who are your enemies and who are your friends.'

'We must match our brains against theirs,' he replied with boyish confidence. 'I don't say I can do much. But no sooner did I know that I was the son of my father, and that I was an Armenian, than I determined to come and help you. You see, I read the letter you wrote to my dad—that is, Admiral Trencrom. You said you were in danger, and that my people here were oppressed.'

'Things have become worse since then,' said the woman.

'Yes, I know,' replied Victor, 'but already I have done something. Forgive me for talking in this way, but it seems to me that you need to look on the bright side of things. Already I have matched my wits against Djevdet Bey, and—and—'

'Yes, I know,' cried the woman. 'Forgive me for not thank-

ing you, but my mind has become so confused with horror, and by the danger which surrounds us, that I forget everything. Your servant has told me what you did, and—and— But what has happened since? Where is she now? That man has spies everywhere, and we Christians are harried and persecuted on every hand. For the moment I am here in safety, but how long will that safety continue? What can we do against so many? We are only one in ten of the population, and the old enmity against Christians is as bitter as ever.'

'Come, come,' said Victor, 'you did not ask me to come here to see you to moan over your fate, but to help you. You must have a lot to tell me, and I have a lot to tell you. What is this?' he cried, casting his eyes on the wall. 'Why, it is an enlarged picture of my father and mother. Think what my father did for our people, and don't let us give up heart!'

'He had to fly the country, and he had to take his wife with him to save her from an awful doom.'

'I know he did,' replied the boy, 'but he has got a son living. We shall do no good by talking about our difficulties, except in so far as it helps us to meet them. Come, now, aunt, I know things are bad enough, but I have a lot to tell you, and you have a lot to tell me. And if these brutes get the better of me, I am going to give them a jolly good run for the money, anyhow.'

Whether she understood his colloquialisms is difficult to say, but the cheery tones of his voice, the flash of his great black eyes, and the suggestion of strength in his every movement, seemed to give her confidence.

'You are right,' she said. 'This is not a time for moaning, but for action.'

'Of course it is,' replied the boy. 'Now let me tell you exactly what I have done, and what has taken place since I left England. After that, you must tell me how things stand, as far as you know them.'

Rapidly he related to her the incidents of his journey, told her of what happened to him at Aleppo, then of his journey to Trebizond, what he had heard there, together with the details of what took place on his way to Van.

'You see, aunt,' he said with a laugh, 'evidently Providence was on our side.'

'Yes,' she said, 'it would seem so. Perhaps I did wrong to allow Urmia and Adana to be taken away from here, but it seemed the only thing to do, and the head of the American Mission also advised me to take this step. But what would have happened to them but for you! They would now be in the power of that man, the playthings of his passions.'

'That isn't the point,' replied Victor. 'I took them away, until they were lodged in a safe place. I shall have something else to tell you presently. But meanwhile, let me go on with my story.'

He then described how he had gained the confidence of Talaat Bey in Erzerum, told too of the visit of the Germans, and of his mission to Djevdet Bey in Van.

'We have a big job, aunt,' he concluded, 'and I am afraid these Turks mean to crush our people worse than ever. God knows I feel that as much as you do. But it's no use repining. I swore to dad—that is Admiral Trencrom—before I left, that I would not rest until I had taken you and my cousin Urmia to a place of safety. Things have happened which make it more difficult than I thought. But that makes it more necessary than ever that we should not show the white feather. We must have increased pluck for increased dangers, and every plot on their part must sharpen our wits.'

'Do you know what has happened to Urmia since you left her at the Convent?' asked his aunt.

Victor laughed, although there was a look in his eyes which betrayed his anxiety.

'Of course I do,' he said. 'Djевdet Bey found out, and told me. But even there I have got the whip hand of him,' and he told her what had passed between them.

'Mark you,' he went on, 'I don't want to deceive you. There is no doubt that the Germans and the Turks mean to exterminate our race. But to be forewarned is to be forearmed.'

'But what can you do?'

'Fight them with their own weapons. I am afraid I cannot do much to save the situation, as far as our people are concerned, but you and Urmia and Adana Ulah must be saved. Indeed you are in no immediate danger.'

'How do you know?'

'Because Djevdet Bey told me whatever else his love means, it means that he is going to guard you for her sake. I have already prevailed upon him to give orders that this house must be protected, so you need not trouble. As for Urmia and Adana, I start to-morrow morning at sunrise at the command of and with the protection of Djevdet Bey.'

For a long time they remained talking, while the woman told him of the condition of the Armenians in Van, and of the threats which she had heard concerning them. When he had heard her story, he told her his plans. In his boyish enthusiasm, he recked not of danger, neither did he think of the events which were hastening on, which would scatter all his hopes to the winds, and which would stagger the world.

Still, he cheered his father's sister, and made her more hopeful for the future. His determined strength, and enthusiastic confidence, made her hopeful in spite of herself, and although she had a feeling of horror that her safety should be secured because of Djevdet Bey's love for her daughter and her friend, she could not help feeling it was wise to accept that protection until Victor could carry out the plans he had formed, and take her to a place of safety.

'I was not troubled about my wealth,' she said. 'All that is nothing compared with Urmia's safety. As for Adana, she is nearly as dear to me as Urmia. Once let us get out of Turkey, once let us get under the protection of England, and then I don't mind what happens. I would willingly die, if I knew they were safe.'

Several times during their conversation, Victor felt that she was keeping something back from him, but although he pressed her to tell him everything, she did not make her secret thoughts, if secret thoughts she had, known to him.

'If the worst come to the worst,' he said, as he left her, 'if this war means a general attack on the Armenians, seek the protection of the American Mission. At present the Turks are afraid of the Americans, and the Germans will not do anything that will offend them. But I hope it won't come to that. Be prepared for anything. Be surprised at nothing, and whatever you do, don't give up hope.'

He left the house by an unfrequented way, Yusef accompany

ing him. More than once they stopped, because they fancied that stealthy footsteps were following them. But although they took great precautions, they could discover no one.

'Now take me to the American Mission, Yusef,' said Victor when they had left the grounds of his aunt's house.

'That is the American Presbyterian Mission, master,' replied Yusef, pointing to a large house. 'The American flag flies over it day and night. How long will you be there ?'

'I should think an hour,' replied Victor.

'In an hour I will return.'

Victor did not ask Yusef where he intended going, or what he proposed doing. Many times since they had left Aleppo he had seen evidences of Yusef's quick brain and resourcefulness. He trusted him completely.

'I feel like a fellow in a dream,' he reflected, as he walked toward a big block of buildings, which could now be seen plainly in the light of the waning moon.

A little later, he was admitted into the building, and found himself facing two men. Both were in European attire, and were evidently persons of importance at the Mission. One was a man of perhaps fifty years of age, sparely built, tall, and somewhat attenuated; but he had a kindly face, and by the look in his eyes Victor knew he had a sense of humour. The other was much younger; he might have been five-and-twenty, and Victor judged him to be a secretary to the older man.

Both looked at him scrutinizingly. They evidently wondered why a young Turk should visit them so late in the evening. He, on his part, also looked at them keenly. He wanted to judge what kind of men they were. Evidently his decision was favourable, for a resolute look came into his eyes.

'What can we do for you ?' said the older of the two men, in very good Turkish.

'A great deal,' replied Victor in English.

Evidently both were startled when he spoke in a tongue little known by the Turks.

'You are the head of this Mission ?' said Victor. 'You are Dr. Greenland ?'

'That is so. Who might you be ?' Excuse me for asking, but you speak English so well that it seems a bit strange.'

'What I have to say must be said quickly,' replied Victor.

'Sit down, won't you?' and Dr. Greenland pointed to a chair which stood near the desk at which he was sitting. The younger man remained standing, his eyes fixed on Victor's face.

Victor returned the look steadily. 'I have important things to say,' he said. 'I assume this gentleman here is in your confidence?'

'Entirely. He has been with me five years, ever since he left Harvard University. All I know about Turkey, and about Van, he knows. His name is Lincoln, he is related to President Lincoln's family.'

'And I am an American citizen,' added the young man.

Victor could not help laughing. The American accent, which was so plainly perceptible in each of their words, and the quiet confidence with which they spoke, seemed to bring him nearer civilization.

'I have heard a great deal about you from the lady Erzinghan, an Armenian lady who lives close by here,' said Victor, 'especially you, Dr. Greenland. You are wondering who I am, aren't you?'

'That is so.'

'And you are wondering what possible business a young Turk who speaks English can have with you at this time of night?'

'That is so.'

'I'll tell you.'

That they were interested in Victor's story was evident. Neither took their eyes from his face during the whole of his recital. Only once did they speak until he had finished. That was an ejaculation which both made when he told them that he was the son of Ibram Alexandropol.

'That is all,' he said, about half an hour later. 'I have now given you a rough outline of my experiences, and what I have heard.'

Both looked very grave. Then Dr. Greenland said, 'You've been sailing close to the wind, young man.'

'He's been doing a remarkably fine thing,' said young John Lincoln with emphasis.

After this there was silence for nearly half a minute, during which time the head of the Mission was evidently thinking deeply.

'Of course we know that war is declared against Russia,' he said. 'But this plot against the Armenians is beyond words. Are you sure of your facts?'

'I have told you nothing but what I am certain of. I have told you because I think you ought to know. You have great influence here, and you will naturally want to protect the people in case of trouble.'

'Naturally,' and it was evident from the expression on the doctor's face that the word meant a great deal. 'This German plot is out-Heroding Herod,' he said reflectively. 'It was born in hell. But for the details you have told me, I could not have believed it. Let us hope it won't come to that.'

'I have told you,' said Victor, 'because, at the first approach of danger, I want you to take my aunt into this Mission and protect her. She would be safe here, wouldn't she? Even Djevdet Bey would not dare to harm her while she is under your protection.'

'Look here,' said John Lincoln excitedly, 'the Stars and Stripes float over this Mission, and behind that flag is the power of America. But I say, this is a strange story you tell about those two girls.'

'I am going to take them to a place where they will be unharmed,' said Victor. 'I must do it secretly, too. But having Djevdet Bey's authority, I shall be able to manage it.'

'I repeat, you are sailing close to the wind, and from a moral standpoint I have my doubts,' said Dr. Greenland.

'I know,' replied Victor. 'If any one had told me when I was in England that I should play the spy, that I should pretend to serve a Turk while I was fighting against him, I should have laughed at him. But I reflect that I am fighting the devil. It may be a quibble, but I have never told Djevdet Bey that I will do his bidding. I have only told him to trust me.'

'But you make him believe that you were his faithful servant.'

'Yes, but what would you do, if you were in my place? You have heard my story. You know the danger that my cousin and her friend are in. These Turks are not men, they are devils. When a detective goes to discover a crime, he adopts all kind of disguises; is he doing an immoral thing?'

'More strength to your arm!' cried John Lincoln. 'I wish I could go with you.'

'You have lived in Van a long time,' said Victor. 'Have you met Urmia Erzinghan and Adana Ulah?'

'I should rather think I have,' and Victor saw that a flush rose to his cheeks.

When he left the house, he found Yusef awaiting him, who led him by a circuitous route back to the hotel.

The next day, long before dawn, the two commenced their journey to the village of Nazak, and at the end of the third day he reached his destination. Here he had a conversation with Dr. Ruschtoun, who was a member of the Dashnaktzoutian Conference, and was a man of importance among the Armenian people. Evidently their conversation was of grave import, for after many hours they were still talking.

'The prospect is dark,' said the doctor; 'can you throw any light on the gloom?'

'You say that Sassoun is a safe stronghold: that there those girls will be beyond the reach of Djivedet Bey?'

'Never yet has it been invaded,' replied the doctor.

'And you say that in three days' time your Conference meets at Erzerum?'

'That is true. We meet to give our reply to the Turkish Government.'

'Then I think I see my way. As soon as it is dark to-night I will take them to the house of Judah Mellichan in the Sassoun stronghold, and when they are safe there, I will hasten on to Erzerum. I will leave it to you to make all arrangements.'

'You will remember all I have said to you?' said Victor to Adana and Urmia, when after many hours he had taken them to the house of Judah Mellichan. 'Remember that wherever I am, I will come to your help.' And Urmia, with tearful eyes, had assured him of her obedience to his wishes, but Adana was silent.

* * * * *

'We meet in secret,' said the President of the Armenian Conference, 'because it would not be well that the Turks should be aware of our decision sooner than is necessary. You remember, all of you, that at our last meeting the Turks made proposals to us that we should make common cause with them in this

war, for even then they knew it was coming. They promised that if we would, Bitlis and Van should be largely our own provinces, and that we should govern them under Turkish suzerainty. They also promised us that the Russian Caucasus, which they would take from them, should be given to us. They told us that the old days of feud should be over, and that Turk and Christian should live peacefully together.

'We cannot but admit, brethren,' went on the President, 'that their promises were fair, but they have promised many things in the past. As you know, I pleaded for time before giving an answer to such important proposals. Hitherto our young men have not been conscripted to the Turkish Army, and although they fought bravely against the Balkan States, we have not been at one with the Turks. What wonder, when we think of our history ! But we have had time to consider, and we have met to decide what we will do.'

Altogether there might have been fifty men present, nearly all of them middle-aged and elderly. Scarcely a young man was present ; and all of them listened very gravely to the President's words. Presently one man rose and proposed that they acceded to the Young Turks' suggestion. He said that with Germany to help them they would probably drive back the Russians and recover that part of the Caucasus, and that under German hands their life and property would be safe. He held out the hope that a new day was dawning for Armenia, and that they might, in spite of all past history, become a great people again.

'But remember,' said another man, 'in fighting against Russia, we are also fighting against our own brethren of the north ; we are also fighting against England, and France, and if we fight against England we shall be like a man fighting against his own mother, who has given him a home, and food, and shelter, in times of stress and storm.'

After this there was much discussion. One urged that England, like other nations, had in the past stood by while their young men were murdered and their women dragged away into shame. Others still again described what England had done for them, and declared that but for England and America they would have been helpless and homeless. It seemed as though, in spite of the division of opinion, that the Conference would decide

to make common cause with the Turks, when the President again spoke.

'I said at the beginning,' he remarked, 'that we meet in secret. But I have taken upon myself the responsibility of admitting a young man, who bears a name honoured among our people. If that name were known, and if it were to get abroad that he is in Erzerum, his life would not be worth a pin's purchase. But we are all friends here, and I may mention it. The son of Ibram Alexandropol is revered wherever Armenian blood flows, and the Armenian history remembered. He is come to help his own people, even as his father helped them. He has had strange experiences, he has heard many things, he has much to tell us. Is it your will to hear him ?'

There was an eager cry of assent from all over the room, and Victor mounted the platform where the President sat.

Rapidly he told his story, and he made them see that if they gave their young men to the war they would, at the same time, deprive themselves of their means of self-protection ; that Turkey only planned their destruction, and that this appeal was a part of their plan. He told of the German plot to exterminate them, and made it clear to them that their safety lay not with the Turks, but with the Russians. He also reminded them that since the outbreak of war, the Armenians of the north with others of their race had come from various parts of the world to help Russia, and that if they joined the Turkish Army they would have to fight their brethren.

The effect of his words was almost electrical. Victor found that he possessed something of his father's power of speech, and he made the Turkish mind plain to them. Consternation fell upon them. They were helpless. They were to be led as lambs to the slaughter. All were agreed that they should refuse to send their young men into the Turkish Army, and even then they did not see how they could be saved from Turkish devilry. They were panic-stricken, and the Conference became a confusion of tongues.

At last one cried out : 'The son of Ibram Alexandropol has told us of danger ; he has told us what not to do. Has he enough of his father's spirit and mind to sketch out a plan of action ? We can do nothing. We are ignorant of the Turks'

plans. War is declared with Russia, but we know of no plan of action. He has told us that we are to be deported and massacred, but from whence is our help to come ?

'I will admit,' said Victor, 'that I have been able to say but little to cheer you, and I am afraid that whatever we can do dark days are to come. But this is clear, our help lies in Russia. North of the Caucasus many of our people live ; they have joined the Russian Army. The Turks know this, and I have discovered that this is their point of attack. They are going with a great host northward, and they hope that because the Russians have sent their armies to the Danube, and to Poland, they will be able to grasp all this part of Russian territory. If Russia is warned, if Russia is told of our danger, she may strengthen herself here by placing a big army to oppose the Turks. If they are victorious, they, with our brethren in the north, will drive the Turks south, and at least some of our people may be saved. It may be, too, now that war is declared against England, that the English and French will send armies to help our people of the south. But this is certain, our immediate help lies in the north.'

'But the Russian army is weak in the north, and if the Turks go in strength they will drive them back,' urged the President.

'Yes,' said Victor, 'that is what they hope. Even now the Turkish authorities are working night and day to gather all their soldiers together, and to march to the Caucasus. That is why the Russian commander-in-chief should be warned.'

'But how can he be warned ? Telegraph offices are closed to us ; letters will be taken, messengers will be killed. Who will go to the Russian Caucasus and warn them of the danger ?'

At this there was a silence, and every man seemed afraid to speak.

'I will go,' said Victor, 'if you think I am trustworthy.'

The next day it was given out in Erzerum that the Armenians did not see how they could raise bands of Armenian volunteers. They suggested that they had no quarrel with Russia, and that it might not be within the power of the Turkish Government to conquer the territory which they had complacently promised them. They also suggested that their treatment in the past did not enable them to put faith in their promises.

When the decision was made known, a great howl of hatred

against the Armenians was heard all over Erzerum, and although but few definite acts of hostility were made known, the cloud which had been gathering for weeks looked blacker and blacker.

Meanwhile, Victor was travelling with hot haste northward.

CHAPTER XV

WITH THE RUSSIAN ARMY

THE Russian General looked at Victor closely when at length he was brought before him. Possibly in the course of his career he had so often met with spies, and enemies who posed as friends, that he suspected him. This man, high in command in the Russian Army, had reached his position not only because of his birth and the influence of his family, but because of outstanding ability. He had rendered signal service to his country during the war with Japan, and age and experience had made his naturally subtle mind doubtful and suspicious. He was by no means a sentimentalist, and he had but little sympathy with the particular form of religion to which the Armenians had adhered for so many centuries. Troubles in his own country with the various sects, who had seceded from the orthodox Church, had made him anything but enthusiastic about the race which the Turks hated. On the other hand, his experience with the Armenians who had, during the last few years, come under Russian rule was favourable. They had proved themselves capable, loyal, and brave, and from the fact that so many of them had willingly volunteered to join the Russian Army at the outbreak of the war made him decide to listen patiently to what Victor had to say.

He could not help being struck, however, by the young man's appearance and demeanour. He did not act like a Turkish Armenian : there was nothing servile, nothing obsequious, in his manner. He stood erect and bold, as though he were the great soldier's equal.

' You come as an emissary from the Armenian Conference in Erzerum ? ' he queried, looking straight into Victor's eyes.

' Yes, your highness.'

' You are very young.'

' That may be in my favour,' replied Victor with a smile.

' Why ? '

' Because youth is more daring than age.'

This conversation had taken place in French. Why the Russian had addressed him in that language, I do not know.

' You do not speak like an Armenian,' said the Russian.

' Neither the educated Armenians of Constantinople nor Asia Minor speak French as you do.'

' That is because I learnt French in England, your highness.'

' In England ! You have been to England, then ? '

' I have lived there all my life, until the beginning of this year.'

' Ah, that is interesting ! How did that come about ? '

Victor told him in a few words, whereupon the Russian's manner became more friendly. One of his brothers had been educated at an English university, and he himself knew the country well.

' And you came to Turkey because—'

' Because my father's sister and her daughter were in peril, and because I believed my people needed me.'

' These papers tell me that you have had strange experiences, and that you have discovered the Turkish plans. Tell me how that came about.'

The General's eyes flashed as Victor told him his story.

' That is good ; it is useful ! ' he cried. ' Then you believe the Turks are going to throw their main strength against us here in the north ? '

' I am sure of it. While I was with old Talaat Bey I learnt the plans which had been made. I also read the orders which came from Constantinople. I was sent with instructions to Djevdet Bey, who, as you know, is brother-in-law to Enver Pasha. I learnt all he was able to tell me. The Turks are greedy to obtain this territory, and they will send a great army here. It is here they hope to find you weak, and to drive you back.'

The General looked thoughtful. He seemed to be calculating the number of men at his disposal and the forces he could put into the field.

' You are thinking of your own people in this ? '

'Yes,' replied Victor, 'but I am thinking of you, too. I am an Englishman by training, and you and France are the Allies of England in this war. Turkey, on the other hand, has joined Germany. If Turkey drives you back, or if she succeeds in crushing your army here, it will be a great blow to the cause in which I believe. I have told you how the Turks mean to treat the Armenians, and of the plans which they have accepted from the Germans by which they mean to exterminate my race. If you strike heavily, and if the Turks fail, you will march southward. You will take Trébizond, and Erzerum, and Bitlis, and Mush, and Van. That will mean that my people in all that territory will be safe.'

The Russian looked at Victor with increased interest. 'You have evidently given some thought to the larger questions of the war,' he said.

'The smaller is enveloped in the larger,' was Victor's reply. 'If you succeed in crushing the Turks, you cripple their power, in so far as they can be of use to the Germans, and under your rule my people will be safe.'

'That is true,' said the Russian, 'but this cannot be done in a day. Even although we succeed in driving the Turks southward, they will still have the greater part of Asia Minor in their control, and I should judge from what you tell me that it will go hard with your people.'

'Yes, but perhaps the British and the French will come up from the south.'

Again the Russian soldier was silent, and again he seemed to be calculating upon the strength at his disposal. A little later, he summoned certain of his officers, with whom he held an eager conversation. He related to them what Victor had told him of the army which the Turks were sending northward.

'We cannot drive them back without great reinforcements,' was the general assent. 'This young man's information is of vital importance; if what he says is true, and we do not get more men, we shall be crushed.'

The General gave rapid instructions, and presently turned to Victor again.

'What are your own plans?' he said. 'Now that you have brought me this message, what do you mean to do?'

'I want to help my people,' replied Victor.

'And how can you help them? If what you say is true, you can best do that by remaining with us here. You say you have taken these young ladies,' and the General smiled as he mentioned them, 'to a place of safety. You say, too, that your father's sister is, for the time at all events, safe in Van; that you have spoken to the head of the American Mission there, who assures you that they will render her all the help in their power. The Turks are afraid to offend America just now, and Germany will advise them to do nothing to offend the Americans; therefore the American Mission should be a sanctuary to her in time of trouble. Acting alone, you will be powerless. By this time both Djevdet Bey and Talaat Bey, and the Governor of Erzerum will know that you have deceived them, and from what I know of them, their revenge will be no make-believe.'

'That is true,' replied Victor, 'I had calculated on it. But I had to take the risk. In no other way could I learn what I wanted to know.'

The General nodded. 'Your knowledge of languages is very important,' he said. 'Do you know anything about soldiering?'

Victor told him of what little knowledge he possessed, while the Russian smiled.

'What you know of the art of war is not of much account,' he remarked. 'All the same, you have brains. More than that, you have initiative, and you are not lacking in courage. Your journey here from Erzerum was no child's play, eh?'

Victor smiled, but made no other reply.

'Just so,' went on the General. 'What do you say to entering our army? You have brought me valuable information, information which may change the whole trend of events. And I think you can best help your people by remaining with me. As for your own safety, I need not remark upon that.'

'In what capacity can I be of service?' Victor asked.

'That is a matter for consideration,' said the General. 'The situation is somewhat irregular. Still, as many of your compatriots have joined our army, why could not you? Naturally you would prefer being in the British Army; but seeing we are all fighting for the same cause, that need form no serious obstacle. I could perhaps obtain a commission for you in an

Armenian regiment, or you might,' he reflected a few seconds, 'you might be of service to me by remaining immediately under my command.'

'I would gladly do this,' replied Victor, 'only——' and he hesitated.

'Yes, only what?'

'I know what a soldier's duties are, and I know that discipline must be maintained. It may be that those I came to serve might stand in special need of me, and I should like a certain amount of liberty to help them, if trouble came.'

Again the great Russian soldier looked at Victor keenly, and reflected. 'I think that might be managed,' he said; 'in times of special difficulty roving commissions are often given.'

A few days later, Victor was to be seen in the Russian camp, wearing the uniform of a Russian officer.

* * * * *

As all the world knows, who have followed the course of events, the Turkish Army moved northward during the whole of November 1914, gathering momentum as it went. From the east to the west of Asia Minor soldiers were gathered. From information which the Turks in high command gathered, the Russian army had sent all its available forces to the Danube and to Poland, leaving the Caucasus practically undefended. A few of the Armenian young men were pressed into the service of the Turkish Army, but only a few. Bitterness towards that oppressed race became more and more pronounced, although no open acts of hostility took place more than was usual; neither, up to December, were the Armenian Christians more than ordinarily persecuted.

It is true that in the district of Lake Urmia, the Nestorian Christians met with a sad fate. The Kahn of Kotchelli, one of the most cruel men that even Turkey ever produced, inspired massacres which are among the most terrible ever known in the East, and which went far to wipe out this little race. But concerning this the Armenians knew but little; trustworthy information was difficult to obtain. Practically no communication existed between them and their brother Christians who lived farther in the direction of Persia. The region was wild and mountainous, only tracks linked village to village; most of the

little townships were isolated ; letters were rare, telegrams almost unknown.

Therefore, in their march forward, the Turks were able to devastate this region, and to murder Christians wholesale, without the world being the wiser. The Turkish armies grew more jubilant, more reckless, as they advanced northward. That great tract of land beyond the Caucasus, much of it very rich and productive, and which they had coveted for many years, and looked upon as their own, was, they believed, to come actually into their possession again.

From east to west they were converging in great force. The imagination of the soldiers was inflamed by the prospect before them. They told one another that they would take the richest lands, the finest houses, and the fairest women for their own. There would be practically no battle, they said, because the Russian army was so small, having been depleted by the forces which they were obliged to send to meet Austria and Germany. So filled were they with this idea, that the Armenians were allowed to remain practically in peace. The thought of an easy victory had made them almost kindly disposed to them for the present. Afterwards, when their work was done, the Armenians in the Asia Minor vilayets could be dealt with. Everything promised well. The journey over the mountains was hard, because the weather was bitterly cold, and snowstorms raged ; but the enveloping movement in the Caucasus went on steadily.

The Turkish officers promised the soldiers all kinds of booty, and inflamed their passions by pictures of the joys into which they should enter when the little Russian force which was to meet them would be destroyed.

Meantime, the Russians made no sign. Nothing of their plans was known. Rumours were afloat that they were retiring from the Caucasus altogether, without striking a blow. Shouts of victory were heard on every hand in the Turkish camp ; neither frost nor snow chilled their ardour ; so that when the last week in December of 1914 came, not only the Turkish army in the Caucasus but the Young Turkish Government in Constantinople were full of wild optimism. It was not war, it was a picnic ; a picnic in cold weather, perhaps, but still a picnic. The territory

which had been lost to them was to be regained ; the revenge which they had nurtured for years was to be theirs.

It was on Christmas Day of 1914 that Victor sought an interview with his general. He had been sent out on a mission of discovery, and had taken his servant Yusef with him. During that time he had had a difficult part to play, and on his return he was eagerly questioned.

The great soldier stood with a grim smile on his lips as Victor told his story.

' You have done well,' said the General ; ' an Eastern mind and a Western education are a fine combination. You say they are jubilant because they are certain of success ? '

' Yes,' replied Victor, ' you see, the subsidiary advance in the east, which has brought most of the Persian province of Azerbaijan under Turkish occupation, and where they have met with practically no opposition, confirms them in the belief which I told you of. The secret of our strength has been kept well. In three days from now they will strike.'

The General smiled grimly. ' Do you know their strength with anything like exactness ? ' he asked.

Victor told him of his discoveries.

' Thanks to your information,' he said, ' when first you came to me, I have been able to prepare for this. Let them come.'

On January 1, 1915, the Turks made their attack. They were wild with religious fanaticism, confident because of their success in Persia, and buoyed up with hope by promises of what should be theirs when they had driven back the Russian army. They attacked with great fury. But in three days wild optimism had been succeeded by the deepest pessimism. Their attack was turned into a rout. The Russian army was five times as strong as they had expected. Their plans had been foreseen, and full advantage had been taken of the foresight.

' We have been betrayed ! ' they cried, as they struggled over the snow, taking with them as much of their ammunition and as many of their guns as they could. ' They were ready for us, and more than ready for us. Death to the traitors ! '

The Turkish generals again and again sent out their instructions to their subordinates, and the subordinates tried to cheer the men to fresh attacks, but all in vain.

On January 3, 1915, the Russians completely defeated the

Turkish forces concentrated at Ardahan in the Caucasus. They destroyed two army corps, captured the commander-in-chief, the divisional generals of the staff, thousands of soldiers, and great quantities of material. It seemed like a repetition of the *débâcle* which had taken place more than two years before when they had been at war with the Balkan States. Over the mountains they struggled, knee-deep in snow, many of them dying of cold and hunger. Wounded men were left uncared for, unattended to, while those who had shouted loudest in the thought of triumph now cursed most deeply in despair.

When the news reached the Government in Constantinople, a state of panic ensued. Many bitterly regretted that they had yielded to German overtures, and as the Russians were making great headway in the region of Poland, they blamed the Germans for drawing them into a net from which they could not escape. But this availed them nothing. Some scapegoat must be sought and found. Enver Pasha declared that there would be a revolution in Asia Minor unless some outlet for their feelings of revenge could be found. One thing was in their favour : the mountainous country, and the state of the weather, prevented the Russians from following them rapidly. Therefore, as they retreated southward, they were able to form themselves into something like an army again.

A conference among the chief men in the army was held, which was attended by envoys from Constantinople.

'It is the Armenians,' it was declared, 'who are responsible for this. They form the great part of the Russian army. They fought like devils. These cursed Christians have done in Russia what their compatriots would not do for us in Asia Minor. At Erzerum the Armenians refused to make common cause with us ; they refused to send their young men into our army, and those who did join have become traitors to us. On the other hand, the Armenians in Russia have joined the Russian army, almost to a man, and they have fought against us.'

Loud and long were the curses against the Armenians. In Erzerum, Mush, Bitlis, and Van hostilities against them were common. The Armenians scarcely dared to stir from their houses. Men walked in fear of their lives, women were outraged, children were murdered. And all this was only the threatening of the storm which, later, broke in fury.

CHAPTER XVI

ACHMA'S OATH

'DEATH to the Armenians !'

'Let every man of them be put to the sword !

'They are the traitors. Through them we have lost the battle. The Armenians in Russia have joined the Russians to a man, while the Armenians in Asia Minor have refused to join us.'

'It is the Armenians who have given information to Russia and prepared them for our coming. They are rich, while we are poor. They have all the best houses, all the banks, all the trade.'

'Down with the Armenians ! Spare neither men, women, nor children. Burn them, drown them, tear them limb from limb !'

These and similar cries were uttered by thousands of hoarse voices all over Asia Minor. The towns especially were hot with hatred. Bands of Turks, armed to the teeth, rushed upon defenceless Armenians, and outraged them and murdered them, while the Turkish authorities looked on with a grim smile, making no protest.

The Turkish forces were retiring from the north, and as they came back they told of disaster and defeat, and they too caught up the cry that it was because of the Armenians they had been defeated. They lusted for revenge, they wanted an outlet for their mad anger, and the feuds of ages, which had been smouldering, leaped into a flame.

Meanwhile, the Russian forces were slowly making their way over the Caucasus, and the people feared that the invading hosts would sweep all before them, and take away their land. Hence the necessity of action. Wild cries were heard on every hand, mad vengeance threatened, although in what form it was to take place the populace as a whole did not know. They could indulge

in their most bestial schemes of revenge and outrage, but even when they had done their all their enemies would remain.

Turkish officials found their way from village to village, fanning the flame. They urged that the curse of their Lord Mohammed was upon them, because they had allowed Christians to live so long within their borders.

'What was the cry of the great Prophet?' they urged.
'"Death or conversion!" That must be our cry. Those who will not accept our faith must die.'

Even in the early days of 1915, mad, cruel, devilish deeds were done. But they were not organized. Each man acted according to his passion, and the sufferings of the Christians of Asia Minor were beyond the power of language to describe. Still, they defended themselves. In their mountain fastnesses, in their village communities, and in some cases even in the towns, they were able to organize defences. Their superior education and intelligence, added to their loyalty to their faith and their bravery, enabled them to withstand the onslaughts of their enemies. But as a whole their condition was terrible.

Meanwhile, the Governors of the various vilayets in Asia Minor held conferences with the Government of the Young Turks in Constantinople. These conferences were attended by Germans, and ere long discordant and confused cries for vengeance were expressed in definite plans.

'Yes,' said the Young Turks, 'the Armenians must be got rid of. What our German allies have told us is right, and this time it must be done effectually.'

Some of the Turks protested against the plans that were made. They urged that the Germans were playing their own game, and working for their own ends; that if they robbed the Armenians they would be only adding to the wealth of their German rulers. They also urged that the Armenians, as a whole, only desired to live in peace and quietness, and that if they had been prosperous, it was because of their more advanced civilization.

But to this the Young Turks would not listen. They had received their orders from the Germans, and those orders pleased their excited passions.

Early in the year 1915 the first step was taken. Every Armenian who had joined the army was to be disarmed. The reason

they gave out for this was that these young soldiers had betrayed them and had fought with the Russians. They professed themselves exceedingly humane and kind in only taking such mild action. Had the English, they urged, found any of their people fighting on the side of the Germans, they would immediately have been put to death. Yet they, the Turks, only disarmed the traitors.

Of course the Armenian authorities protested. They referred to a communique written by the commander-in-chief of the Turkish Army. He stated that the Armenians had fought with a special bravery. They also urged that the commander-in-chief had written to their chief patriarch, expressing his appreciation of the Armenian soldiers ; and that this fact had been printed in the Turkish newspapers.

But all this had no effect. The few thousand Armenians who had joined the Turkish Army were disarmed, and were placed in positions whereby they would be helpless to render assistance to their own people.

That was the first step. The second step was immediately taken. All the *Armenian people of every sort* were to be disarmed.

Again the Turks urged that this was necessary for the safety of the Empire. These Armenians, they said, were disloyal to Turkey, and therefore, for the safety of the faithful, they were obliged to take precautions. They, in their benevolence to the Armenians, had allowed them in the past to carry arms in order to protect themselves against the Kurds and other wild tribes of fanatical Moslems. But as they abused their kindness, this step had to be taken.

Turkish officials scoured the whole of Asia Minor, issuing the proclamation that all Armenians were to deliver up their arms to Turkish authorities. Only comparatively few of the people possessed arms. And then a reign of persecution commenced, because they could not deliver up weapons which they did not possess. At that time a big trade went on among the Turks, who visited the Armenians telling them that only by buying arms from them, and delivering them up, could they fulfil the Turks' desires. When these weapons were bought, at exorbitant prices, and were placed before the Turkish officials, photographs of them

were taken and published to the world, showing great heaps of guns, knives and swords, and rifles ; and advanced them as proof positive of the Armenian intentions.

This act of disarming the Eastern Christians was accompanied by indescribable things. Those who protested or resisted in the slightest degree were openly murdered. Scenes were enacted which, if Torquemada were alive, he must have envied. Men's eyes were gouged out, their nails were pulled out by the roots ; women were openly shamed, little children murdered.

When American consuls protested against these things, and declared them inhuman and unnecessary, as well as foully unjust, the Turkish officials expressed great sorrow. One Turk in high position declared that he could not sleep at nights for thinking of the people suffering. 'But think,' he added, 'we can do no other. See what has been proved ! Every Armenian house is a hotbed of treason. Weapons have been brought to us by the hundred thousand, showing how necessary it was for us to deal with them with a stern and strong hand.'

Others, however, were more outspoken and more truthful. 'There is no room for Christians in Turkey,' they said, 'and it is as well to get rid of them by one means as another.'

Almost every Armenian house in Asia Minor was a scene of wailing and agony. Women went around with chalk-white faces and dread terror in their eyes. Little children feared to speak above a whisper, while young men muttered curses, feeling all the time their helplessness, and dreading the terrible doom that was coming. All law, all order, as far as these people were concerned, was annulled. Every Turk pillaged, outraged, murdered, according to his fancy, and although in some cases there was public condemnation, there were at the same time private congratulations.

At length the work was completed. Every Armenian in Asia Minor, according to the Turkish officials' report, was disarmed, and being disarmed, was helpless.

'I think we are ready now for bigger things,' said a Young Turk to the German Ambassador in Constantinople. Your Dr. Rohrbach's scheme can now be carried out. These scenes of outrage and massacre have been very terrible, very deplor-

able. Now, for the sake of the Armenians, for their safety and for their well-being, they must be deported.'

The German laughed. 'They will never come back again,' he said.

'No,' said the Turk, 'that is the best of it.'

'When will you commence?' asked the German.

'Wait,' was the reply, 'it will only be a few days now. We are making arrangements whereby all those refugees who were driven out of the Balkan States shall come to Asia Minor, and possess themselves of the property of the Armenians.'

The German laughed. 'You will not, of course, do this openly,' he said, 'it will not sound well to the world, and as we are your allies, we desire to place everything in a favourable light. You must remember that countries like America have tremendous power. I must insist on that.'

'Do not fear,' said the Turk. 'We, the Turkish Government, will give guarantees that all their property, which cannot, of course, be taken with them, shall be taken care of by our Government until they return. You see,' added the Turk, with a leer, 'we are only sending them away for a little while, just long enough for the anger of the people to die down. When the trouble is over, they will again return, and enter into their own. Meanwhile they will make the desert bloom and blossom as the rose.'

The German laughed. 'It is one of the best jokes since the days of Herod,' he said.

'And it was perpetrated by a German,' retorted the Turk, 'and when a German makes a joke, we know what it means.'



Djevdet Bey sat alone in the room where we first saw him in Van. A few months had made a great difference in his appearance. He was no longer fat, sleek, and complacent. There was a look of apprehension in his eyes, the cruel lines around his mouth had deepened. His whole appearance suggested defeat rather than victory, and well it might. So far his plans, both public and private, had come to nothing. The army which had been sent out from the province of Van, while successful for a time in Persia, had been put to rout in the Caucasus. Stragglers were coming back, telling bitter stories. The Government at

Constantinople looked upon him with disfavour. The things he had advised ended calamitously.

Djevdet Bey was not at first in favour of the Germans' scheme. He did not love the Germans; he was jealous of their power. Cunning as he thought himself, he found the German officials in Van were more cunning than he. Even there, where his power should have been supreme, the German influence was dominant.

But not only had his public schemes spelt failure, his private desires had also come to nothing. Never, since the youth who came to him from old Talaat Bey had left him, had he received a report. He had sent him to take the two women on whom he had deigned to smile in love from the refuge in which they had found shelter, to a house of his own on the north of the lake, to which he often resorted. When a month had passed away, and he had heard nothing, he had made inquiries, but no news of any sort was forthcoming. He could not at that time leave Van, because his public duties became so pressing, and he could come to no other conclusion than that Suliman had played him false. But where Suliman was he did not know, although he had sent out spies in all directions.

Djevdet Bey was not a man to be easily baulked of his prey, and he had sworn more than once never to rest until these two fair Armenian girls were completely in his power.

Presently a servant entered the room.

'His excellency Achma el Amad,' announced the servant, and a few seconds later Achma and Djevdet were alone. Evidently the former bore important news.

"Allah is great," he said, "and may Allah's smile rest upon his favoured servant! May he obtain his heart's desire, and may his enemies be overthrown!"

"You have discovered something," and Djevdet Bey's manner was abrupt and eager. "Is your news good or bad?"

"Both," replied Achma.

"Tell me quickly."

"You have been betrayed, my lord," he said, and there was a cruel look in his eyes. "You, even you, have been outwitted. He whom you trusted has deceived you, and he laughs at your trusting heart."

'Who, Suliman? How can that be? He was sent to me from Talaat Bey.' Djevdet turned eagerly to some papers. 'It is written here,' he said, 'Suliman—'

'His name is not Suliman,' broke in Achma. 'I had my suspicions when I saw him here, but my mind was muddy, and I dared not speak. I sent out spies, with command that they should bring him to me. I wanted to make my suspicions certainties. But some one helped him; who, I do not know. Once he has beaten me, twice he has beaten me; he shall never beat me again.'

'I do not understand,' Djevdet noted the tone of passion in Achma's voice, 'you are hiding something from me, tell me the whole truth.'

'Remember you Ibram Alexandropol?' queried Achma.

'Who does not? It was he who supplied brains to the Armenians twenty years ago. It was he who thwarted me in plans I had made then. I swore to have him killed, but he escaped, escaped to England with his wife, in spite of all I could do. He outwitted me, out-planned me.'

'Yes,' replied Achma, 'and I had cast my eyes in love on the Armenian woman he married, and I swore to possess her, and he outwitted me. Great Allah, how I hate his memory!'

'But what has Ibram Alexandropol to do with all this?' asked Djevdet. 'He is dead. News came to me of his death from a source which I can trust fully.'

'Aye, but he had a son,' replied Achma. 'That son was adopted by an English admiral, and he believed himself to be the admiral's own child. He was trained in an English university, and it was believed that he was intended for the Diplomatic Service. By some means, it was revealed to him that he was the son of Ibram Alexandropol. I was informed of his coming. He came to Aleppo, and I thought I had him in my power. But he escaped me. That was before war was declared, and I had to be careful. I was told that he came to rescue the lady Erzinghan and her daughter, and to stir up rebellion among his own people. I made my plans; I thought I had him in the hollow of my hand, and then, when I thought everything was ready, I found that he had gone, whither I knew not. I hated the son for his father's sake, and as you know, I boasted I was never

beaten.. So I set inquiries on foot. It was he who destroyed your plans ; it was he who took away the maidens you love. I told you this before.'

' Then, this Suliman is the son of Ibram Alexandropol ? '

' He deceived old Talaat Bey ; he deceived you. When I saw him, I felt something was wrong. Because of what you told me, I did not connect him with Ibram Alexandropol's son ; but when I was alone, I thought, and thought, then I felt sure. So I determined to have him watched, and to have him brought before me. But he eluded me ; again my plans came to naught. For I received a letter, purporting to come from my brother, who lives at Ispahan, six hours' journey up the lake. He said he was in great danger, and needed my presence. So urgent was it that I could not delay. When I reached my brother, I found that the letter was a forgery, and while I was gone, he escaped me a second time.

' But where did he go ? '

' With your authority, he was able to go whither he would, and to learn many things. He went to the place we knew of, but instead of taking the women to your house, he took them to a place of his own.'

' Where ? ' asked Djevdet Bey eagerly. ' Do you know that ? '

' Yes, I know.'

' And is he with them ? '

' No,' replied Achma.

' Where are they, then ? '

' They are at the Armenian stronghold at Sassoun.'

Djevdet's eyes flashed, partly with anger, partly with relief.

' Then all is not lost,' he said.

' It will need five thousand men to take them.'

' I will send five times five thousand.'

' May your desires be gratified,' said Achma. ' But love is not for me. I have sworn that I will be revenged on the son of Ibram Alexandropol.'

' Do you know where he is ? ' and Djevdet Bey looked eagerly at the other.

' It is he to whom we owe our defeat,' cried Achma, with a snarl.

' How can that be ? '

' He was too clever for us. Through old Talaat, through the Governor of Erzerum, through the Germans he met there, through you, and through the authority you gave him, he was able to learn our plans. He got a knowledge of our numbers, he learnt our secrets. Then he went ahead of us to the Caucasus, made himself known to the Russian commander-in-chief, told him everything. Immediately the Russians arranged for a larger army, and our attack ended in a rout.'

The Turk's eyes burned red with rage.

' Where is he now ? ' he asked hoarsely.

' He is with the Russian army,' replied Achma ; ' he is an officer there.'

' Then I am powerless to touch him.'

' No,' said Achma, ' I have a plan which I swear shall not go wrong. Listen, my lord, while I tell you how your heart's desires may be fulfilled, and how the son of Ibram Alexandropol shall be put in your power again.'

' If you do this for me,' said Djevdet Bey, ' you shall be the richest man in Aleppo.'

' I swear it,' said Achma, ' swear it by the Prophet's beard, by the sacred tomb in Mecca, by all the virgins in Paradise, by the great Allah himself I swear it. Listen, my lord, and I will tell you how your heart's desire shall be accomplished, and your vengeance assured.'

' Speak on.'

For a long time Achma spoke. Eagerly he unfolded the plan he had made, while Djevdet Bey listened with strained ears.

CHAPTER XVII

THE TWO GIRLS

'Oh, I am so afraid! I wish he were here. Ever since he left I have felt that a great black cloud was gathering, and it has grown bigger and bigger every day. When he was near us, I feared nothing, now I fear everything.'

It was Urmia Erzinghan who spoke. The two girls were sitting alone in the house of the old Armenian who had given them shelter, in the stronghold of Sassoun.

The other did not reply. She sat looking out of the window across the wild mountainous region which stretched around them on every side.

'You were different, too,' went on Urmia.

'I different, how?'

'You do not tell me things like you used to. Months ago you kept nothing from me; you were more than a sister to me. But now I feel as though something hangs between us.'

'Do not be foolish, Urmia.'

'But I am not foolish,' persisted the other. 'Everything about you is changed. You have frightened me, too, terribly.'

'Frightened you, how?'

'You have not told me where you went during the time you were missing from the convent. And when I asked you, you closed your lips in silence. I am sure you know of dangers unknown to me.'

'What dangers?'

'I cannot tell you. But I cannot sleep at night thinking of them.'

'What have you to fear?'

'Oh, I fear about mother, and I fear about him. I never dreamed he would be like he is, Adana. I had often been told about my English cousin, and how he had been adopted by a great British admiral. I used to fancy what he was like, and wonder if I should ever see him. It seemed so wonderful that he should come to us, didn't it? And he came, too, when we needed him the most. But I never thought he would be like he is.'

'What did you think he would be like?'

'Oh, I fancied he would be cold and proud and haughty, like I have been told the English are. All the same, I was so interested in him that I learnt English when I was at school, so that I might be able to talk with him, if ever he came to us. I did not know it very well, although the little I do know seems to make him nearer to me. But when he came, oh, he was wonderful, wasn't he? He knew our language just as we know it, and although he was dressed like a Turk, I felt he was not one. I trusted him the moment I saw him. Don't you remember, Adana, how he came to us and spoke to us? We were afraid then, weren't we? Oh, it does seem like a dream! And when he fought with that great Turk up by the side of the river, do you remember how his eyes flashed? I thought I was going to faint when the Turk seemed to be mastering him. And I felt so jealous of you afterwards, because of what you did. It was you who saved his life. And wasn't he kind to us after he recovered from his illness? When he is near, I do not feel as though I had a fear or a care in the world; but when he is gone, I feel so helpless: nothing seems right.'

'We have nothing to fear, Urmia,' Adana said presently; 'your mother is safe, and this Sassoun stronghold has never been conquered. So you are safe here.'

'How do you know my mother is safe?' asked Urmia.

'We have the message which came from her.'

'Yes,' replied Urmia, 'but it was not a letter written by mother.'

'That is because Armenians are not allowed to write letters,' was the reply. 'But that young man in the American Mission, John Lincoln, wrote of her safety. A messenger came to us to tell us.'

'Yes, he is splendid, too,' said Urmia. 'But he is not like

Victor. Victor is so strong, so daring, and so clever, that I never felt afraid when he was near.'

' You seem very fond of him,' and Adana looked at the other keenly.

' He is my cousin,' replied Urmia, ' how can I help being fond of him? And did he not leave his beautiful home in England to come to our help? Oh, I think it was splendid! Just think, he might have been a great man in England, and a rich man in that land where everybody is happy, and everybody is free. They, because they are so strong, cannot understand the Armenians, who have been always persecuted and distressed; but he did. He left everything to come to us, and he is my cousin. What wonder that I am fond of him! Aren't you fond of him, too, Adana?'

Adana's face was motionless for a few seconds.

' He has been very kind to us,' she said presently, ' and I admire him very much. I always admire strong men. He is one who can not only think, but do. Especially do I remember one thing he said.'

' What was that? ' asked Urmia.

' He said that before one could *do* one must *know*.

' But what do you mean by that? '

' I mean,' and Adana started from her seat, ' I mean that I hate being helpless; I mean that I am angry with God for making me a woman. If I had been a man, I—I would have saved my people. I would have outwitted these Turks. I—I would have done like the English have done wherever they have gone—' She hesitated a few seconds, and then went on again.

' Wherever the English have gone they have been masters. They went to America, and became masters, they went to Australia and became masters, they did the same in India, in Africa. They were but a few amongst many, yet they conquered, and see how great they are now; while we, we Armenians, have always been the same. Our ancestors were kings in this very country, and yet, now, see what we are! Startled at every sound, frightened at every rumour, trembling at every threat! The Turks are low, vicious beasts, yet they are our masters. We have suffered more than any race ever known, and think of what we are suffering now! We know so little, too; we hear of ghastly

things that are being done at Mush, at Bitlis, and down among the mountains farther south. We hear that our people are being persecuted on every hand, and killed by thousands. Can we suffer, and suffer, and do nothing? That is why I wish I were a man, then I could do something. But what is a woman here in Asia Minor? She is a chattel, a plaything. Look at us now, we two girls! We have been taken from place to place, without thought or will of our own. We depend on others to protect us, and we have to eat out our hearts in silence. Why should we have to depend on men to guard us from danger?

'Because they are stronger and wiser than we are,' said Urmia.
'What is the matter with you?'

She had scarcely spoken, when the door opened, and old Judah Mellichan, accompanied by two men, entered the room. It was evident by the look on their faces that something of importance had happened.

Urmia started from her chair, and took two or three steps towards the old chief with a look of excited inquiry in her eyes. Adana, on the other hand, sat still and waited, as if in expectation.

'I have grave news for you, my children,' said Judah. 'These men come from the Russian army; their journey here has been one of great peril, but, by the mercy of God, they have arrived.'

'What is it?' asked Urmia.

'In a week from now all this region will be infested by enemies. Already in the south, especially in Cilicia, our people have been taken from their homes and sent southward. I hear terrible things about them. The Turks say that they have been sent to Mesopotamia for their own good; but I, who know all the land there well, realize that they only go to their death. Already scores of thousands have been what they call deported, and it is only a ruse to murder them. And now we are told they are about to attack Sassoun. If they do, I am afraid it will be no longer a safe hiding-place for you. But do not fear. These men have come to tell you how your safety can be provided for.'

'How?' asked Urmia breathlessly. 'Who are they? Where do they come from? Who sent them?'

'We come bearing a letter from Captain Victor Alexandropol,' replied one of the men.

CHAPTER XVIII

A WOMAN'S INTUITION

'WILL you tell them what you have told me?' said Judah, turning towards the strangers.

One of them was a young man, scarcely thirty; the other was much older. They were dressed as Turks, but from secret signs they had given to Judah, he knew them to be Armenians. Tall, black-haired, black-eyed men they were; their clothes much soiled and travel-stained. Their boots gave evidence that they had travelled a long distance.

'We come from your brothers in the north,' said the spokesman; 'we have been sent by Captain Alexandropol. It has been a hard and perilous journey, but we have eluded the enemy, and we have also gained much information on the way.'

'Yes, yes,' said Urmia, 'but you say you have come from my cousin, Victor Alexandropol, and that he has sent a message to us. Where is it?'

The man unfastened his clothes, and took from a cunningly contrived pocket in his undergarments a package, which he passed to the girl.

'It is written there,' he said.

There was no superscription on this package, it was simply a plain piece of paper. Urmia eagerly tore it open; but when she had unfolded the papers, there was nothing to be seen.

'Nothing is written,' cried the girl; 'there is nothing but blank paper. Did not my cousin explain? What does this mean?'

'He said this to us,' replied the man, "take this to the two maidens who are in the house of Judah Mellichan, in the Sassoun stronghold, and tell them to hold it to the light."

Urmia flew to the window, and held the paper against the

glass. ‘There is writing here,’ she said excitedly, ‘but I cannot read it. It is in English, but I cannot understand a word. Adana, you know English better than I : come and look.’

Adana, who had not once moved her eyes from the men’s faces, obeyed Urmia’s will. In a few seconds she had traced the words that had been written ; this was what she read—

‘The men who bring you this may be trusted. I have proved them, and found them worthy. Do as they bid you. Sassoun is no longer safe : it will soon be attacked by the enemy. They will bring great guns and a big army, and they will lay every village in the dust. Djevdet Bey will be with them, and he has sworn he will take you both to his harem. All the other people will be put to the sword. Do not delay, accompany these men, who will take you to Danana, where I will await. Do not hesitate, or that which is a thousand times worse than death will be your doom. If you fly with these men at once, there will be nothing to fear.—VICTOR ALEXANDROPOL.’

She read the words slowly, carefully, and with difficulty enunciating each syllable.

‘He has come to save us again,’ cried Urmia. ‘Oh, Adana, listen to what he says ; let us not delay a second !’

But Adana did not appear to heed her. She looked intently at the faces of the men, as if wondering.

‘This, you say was given you by Captain Victor Alexandropol ?’ she said to the messengers.

‘Three days ago he gave it to us,’ replied the man. ‘He bade us not to spare ourselves, and we have obeyed. The road has been rough, so rough that much of the distance we have had to go on foot, but we are here to do your bidding, and horses await to take you to Danana.’

‘You know what this letter contains, then ?’

‘We know nothing except what the captain told us. He said, “Go to the house of Judah Mellichan, ask for the ladies Urmia Erzinghan and Adana Ulah ; give them this. When they have read it, you will take them to an inn in Danana, called *The White Prophet*, where I will await them.”’

‘Where were you when he gave you this ?’ asked the girl.

We were with the Russian army in the Caucasus. We have been under his command ever since he left Asia Minor, we have fought under him. We are Armenians, who live beyond the mountains, and joined the Russian army when the war broke out.'

'Did he say anything else to you ?'

'This is not a time for explanations,' replied the man, 'but for action. Danger and doom are moving upon you with the swiftness of the wind.'

'Did he tell you so ?'

'He has received information that Djevdet Bey is coming to Sassoun with a great army. The Russians are not able to come south fast enough to save the villages : that is why he sent us. We did not get here with the speed we expected, because the enemy stands thick around. Already our people are suffering horrors at the hands of the Turks. On our way here, we saw them dragged out of their houses, and sent away in droves southward. We saw little children murdered. They were thrown up in the air and caught on the Turks' bayonets. But worse than this, we saw the fairest maidens openly shamed, and sent to worse than death, by their captors. No Armenian will be safe.'

Urmia gave a long, quivering sigh as the man spoke.

'Let us go, Adana,' she whispered hoarsely ; 'we shall be safe with him.'

Still Adana did not move. She kept her eyes fixed upon the messengers.

'We passed through great peril in getting here,' went on the man ; 'we found that the Turkish army was moving fast towards these mountains, and they were vowing the direst vengeance, and boasting what they would do.'

'Alas, that is true !' said old Judah. 'I am too old to fight, but already our young men are preparing for an attack. We shall struggle to the last, but what can we do against a great army ?'

'I bid you make all speed,' went on the messenger. 'If you delay, we can do nothing.'

'Come, Adana,' cried Urmia ; 'why do you wait ? Don't you hear what the man says ?'

For Adana was looking out of the window with a strange ex-

pression in her eyes. Again she held the paper to the light, and read the words written there.

'How far is Danana from here?' she asked.

'With the horses I have obtained, twenty hours.'

'And where is it? I never heard the name before.'

'It is reached by a lonely way. The Captain chose it because the Turks would not think of going there, and because from there he can take you to a place where the Turks cannot reach you.'

'At what time did Captain Alexandropol say he would be at the inn which bears the sign of *The White Prophet*?' asked Adana.

'He will be awaiting you even now,' was the messenger's reply. 'Would the lady forgive me if I remind her that time is flying, and that we have none to waste?'

A look of resolution came into the girl's eyes.

'We will be ready in three hours.'

'Three hours!' repeated the man. 'By that time it will be dark.'

'That will make it all the safer for us to travel; to leave in the day-time would be to court danger. Besides, you need rest and refreshment. Come, Urmia, let us go and prepare for the journey.'

'But the Captain bade me tell you not to wait a second,' said the man.

'I am sure you need food and rest,' replied the girl. 'In three hours it will be dark. Have the horses ready.' She left the room as she spoke, Urmia following her.

When they reached their bed-chamber, she threw herself on a divan, and held her hands tightly over her eyes.

'Adana, what is the matter? Why are you waiting? We must haste to get ready.'

Still the girl did not move.

'Adana, Adana——!'

'Hush, Urmia, let me think.'

'Oh, come, let us make haste! If we do not go quickly Victor will think some harm has happened to us. Was it not good of him to send for us in this way?'

She drew Urmia to her side, and whispered in her ear.

'He did not send for us,' she said; 'it is all a lie.'

'What do you mean?' asked the girl.

'I mean what I say. Victor never sent those men.'

'But you have his letter! It is written in English!'

'He never wrote it.'

'How can you say so? Do you know his writing?'

'No, I never saw it. But he never wrote that. English people do not write like that. I have seen English people's writing many times, and I know. It is true it is in English, but it is written as a Turk writes English. Then there is another thing.'

'Yes, what?' gasped Urmia, like one stricken in terror.

'When he left us, he told us to be careful not to be deceived. He told us not to place ourselves in the power of any man, not to believe in any messengers, unless they were submitted to the strictest proofs.'

'But the men told the truth about the Turks attacking Sassoun,' cried Urmia; 'you remember what Judah said?'

'There is another thing,' went on Adana, without seeming to heed what the other had said, 'he would not have sent a letter to us, he would have remembered what he said to me when we parted here.'

'What was that?'

'He said, "If you are in danger, I will come to you." But he has not come. He would not wait for us in a village twenty hours away, and send two strange men to bring us. That would not be like him: he would come himself.'

'But what does it mean, Adana? If you are right, what can we do? Besides, I am sure they are Armenians: they know our signs. Else Judah would have known that these men were enemies. He is very wise.'

'There are some men who would sell their souls for gain,' said the girl, and her voice grew hard. 'We know that some of our people are traitors—not many, thank God, but there are some.'

'Then you believe—'

'Hush, do not speak so loud. I do not know what I believe.' She walked hastily across the room, opened the door, and looked into the corridor. She seemed to fear lest some one might be listening. Then she went to the window and looked out. The daylight was already beginning to fade, but she saw one of the men standing near the house as if watching.

'But if you are right,' said Urmia, 'Victor may be in danger, too.'

Adana started, as if some one had struck her. 'I had not thought of that!' she almost gasped. 'Be quiet a minute.'

She threw herself on the divan again, and looked out of the window towards the mountain peaks. For more than a minute she did not speak, while Urmia watched her with terror-stricken eyes.

'Speak, speak, Adana!' gasped the girl, after a long silence. 'I am afraid—surely you can't be right! Perhaps—perhaps Victor would have come, but he could not. Perhaps a big battle is going on; perhaps—perhaps—oh, I don't know what to think! We are so helpless, we can do nothing, nothing.'

A look of resolution came into Adana's eyes. Evidently she had made up her mind.

'Urmia,' she said, 'will you go—no, I will do it myself. You stay here, and walk around the room as though you were getting ready for a journey. I will be back in a few minutes.'

'Where are you going?'

'Do not be afraid, I shall not leave the house.'

Swiftly, noiselessly, she left the room, and found her way to another part of the house. Here she came across an old woman, the sister of Judah, who had lived with him many years.

'Where is Judah?' asked the girl.

'But a minute ago he was out talking with those two strange men,' was her reply. 'But he has come in again. He is only in his own room now, where his books are.'

'Will you ask him to come here?'

The old woman did as she was bid.

Rapidly Adana told old Judah of her fears, while he looked at her with incredulous eyes.

'You are mad, my child,' he said; 'you have fever in your brain. What the men have told me is the truth. Through them we shall be able to make some kind of defence, for we *shall* defend ourselves to the very last. Only you must go, my child; there is no safety for you here.'

Again she spoke to him eagerly, passionately. 'Those men are liars; they are our enemies,' she cried. 'I tell you I am sure. Send out secret messengers at once, and get some of our young

men to arrest them, then see how they will behave. Place them somewhere apart, where they cannot communicate with any one or with one another.'

Evidently she made Judah realize that she had reason on her side. For a few minutes he was evidently incredulous, but as she told him of her convictions, and of the plots that she believed were being made, his eyes flashed angrily.

' You may be right,' he said, ' and I will do what you say. But what is to become of you ? '

' Do as I ask you,' cried the girl, ' and do not fear for us. You say they have their horses ready ? '

' Even now they stand by the gate waiting,' replied the old man.

Rapidly she spoke again, in low, whispered tones. Then she rushed back to the room where Urmia was.

' What have you been doing, Adana ? Where have you been ? Tell me, tell me—everything ! '

' Urmia,' said Adana, looking straight into her friend's eyes, ' do you love your cousin ? Do you love Victor Alexandropol ? '

' Why do you ask such a question ? ' asked Urmia wonderingly.

' But do you ? I don't ask without a reason.'

The blood mounted to the girl's face as she looked into Adana's eyes. ' Of course I love him,' she said, ' how could I help it after all he has done ? '

' Do you love him enough to dare for him, to suffer for him, to fight for him ? '

' Dare, suffer, fight ! You frighten me, Adana.'

' Yes, but do you ? '

' I would do anything in my power for him,' cried the girl. ' He has saved us more than once. But tell me what you mean.'

' Listen,' said Adana, as she drew nearer her friend.

* * * * *

Travelling southward from the Caucasus were two young men. They had evidently come a long distance. In the eyes of one of them was a look almost amounting to anguish. Two days before, he had received a message from what had appeared to him a faithful messenger, and which he had read many times.

It contained only a few words, and was evidently written by a woman. This was what he read—

' We are in great peril. The Turkish army is attacking Sassoun. Djevdet Bey is with them; he has threatened terrible things, and we dare not stay here. Judah Mellichan has provided us with an escort to Danana, where there is an inn kept by one of our people, called *The White Prophet*. But we can only be safe there for a short time. I beseech you come to our help, for we are nearly mad with terror.'

After Victor had read this missive, he made his way to the Russian general, under whom he had served ever since joining the Russian army, and laid it before him. In a few seconds he had given him the necessary explanation.

The General looked grave as he read. ' You know these women ? ' he said.

' One is my cousin, the other is her dearest friend.'

' What do you want me to do ? '

' Give me leave to go to them, to rescue them.'

' How can you do this ? '

Victor explained the plan which had been quickly born in his mind.

' This is madness,' said the General; ' to get there, you would have to pass through the Turkish lines.'

' That is not impossible. Anyhow, I would like to risk it.'

' Would you go alone ? '

' I would only take my servant, Yusef.'

For a few minutes he discussed his plans with the General, and told him how he would have no difficulty in passing in Turkish Asia Minor. The General laughed at his enthusiasm, and at the way he regarded difficulty and danger.

' Only yesterday,' said Victor, ' you told me of certain information you wanted. All the day I have been planning how I could get that information. I was about to come to you when this letter came. If I succeed, I not only save my cousin and her friend, but I serve you at the same time.'

' It is a mad thing to try,' said the General, ' but go, and God be with you.'

I will not attempt to describe how Victor and Yusef succeeded in passing through some of the greatest perils which ever beset men who were engaged upon a dangerous enterprise. Doubtless he was helped by the fact that he had been able to get hold of the uniforms of Turkish soldiers. Also he had been enabled to read dispatches, which were of great assistance, and which enabled him to answer awkward questions. His knowledge of the language, and his gift of playing a part, more than once saved his life.

'Yusef,' he said, 'do you know where this village of Danana is?'

'I have been there once, master. It is a lonely place among the mountains.'

'And have you ever seen the inn called *The White Prophet*?'

'No,' replied Yusef, 'but it can easily be found.'

* * * * *

On the evening of day when the messengers came to the house of old Judah Mellichan, Achma el Amad sat in a room in the inn of *The White Prophet* in Danana. Before him lay a copy of the Koran, which he read diligently.

'Allah is great!' he said, 'and Allah is good. This time none of them shall escape me.' And he laughed as he turned to that part of the book which described the joys of the warriors of the Prophet when they had entered Paradise.

CHAPTER XIX

A WOMAN'S COURAGE

AS we have said, the village of Danana was situated in the heart of a mountainous district, a few hours' ride from the Sassoun stronghold. The approach to the village on either side of the valley was only a track, which during the winter was wellnigh impassable. Now that spring had come, however, travelling had become more easy, and although the country was in a state of war, travelling merchants who passed from town to town carried on their business.

Although Danana was not a large place, and was completely shut off from the more populous district contiguous to Mush and Bitlis, it was still regarded as of importance. Two men who had been reputed to be very holy, and had suffered much on behalf of the Mohammedan faith, had lived there, and a large mosque in memory of them towered over the little town. A number of Armenians lived there, and through the years had become very prosperous. In times of peace, these Armenians had lived on comparatively good terms with their Turkish neighbours, but since the declaration of war against the Russians who were believed to uphold the Armenian faith, a great deal of bitterness existed.

Rumours had reached the village of terrible massacres in Van, and it was also said that Mush and Bitlis were to be the next places where Djevdet Bey was to wreak his vengeance. But as yet no massacres had been known in Danana.

One evening in May, two young Turkish soldiers, apparently of high rank, rode into the little town. Young as they were, each of them wore a green turban, which signified that they had taken the great pilgrimage to Mecca, and had made their vow before the tomb of Mohammed. Both were armed to the teeth,

and one of them, especially, rode with a kind of swagger. Their horses were richly caparisoned, and pranced gaily along the dirty, stony track which led to the heart of the town.

Nearing the great mosque of Eed-al-Kurban the young men stopped their horses, and spoke to an old man clad in a long green gown, richly embroidered, who might have been the sheikh of the village. The young men saluted him, and one of them dismounted.

'After I have been to the Beit Allah, and given thanks for protection during my journey,' said the young man, 'I would find an inn where I can get refreshment for man and horse.'

The old Turk smiled benignantly.

'You have travelled far?' he asked.

'From Van,' replied the youth. 'But the country is much disturbed, and travelling was difficult.'

'Hath Djevdet Bey returned to Van?' asked the old man, with a certain amount of eagerness.

'An advance-guard has come back,' replied the youth, 'but Djevdet Bey had not arrived when we left.'

'Are the stories that one has heard true?'

'What stories?'

'That the vengeance of Allah is at last falling upon the accursed.'

'Have you heard that?'

'But yesterday a man came from Mush, and told me he had talked with men who had been at Van, and who told him that 5,000 Christians had been massacred in the streets. Is it true, or is it only an idle tale?'

The young Turk changed colour.

'One must not talk about all one knows,' he said. 'But you, as Sheikh-ul-Islam, of Danana, should be well informed as to what is taking place in all the provinces.'

The old man's eyes flashed.

'I am not Sheikh-ul-Islam,' he replied; 'I am only the Nazir. Were I Sheikh-ul-Islam, things would be better governed in Danana. But what would you? He is an old man, and hardly able to totter from his dwelling-place.'

'Seeing that is the case, all his duties will devolve upon you.'

'That is true. I have much to do, and, as you say, the times

are troublos. Any day we may expect great doings here.
 'Great doings here? what may that mean?'

The old man drew nearer.

'There are a thousand Armenians in Danana,' he said, 'a thousand dogs to eat the children's bread, a thousand snakes who seek to poison the blood of the faithful. They have all the money, they keep the shops, they own the bank, and some say that even the inn called *The White Prophet* is owned by two rich Armenians; but concerning that I am not sure. Rascheed Dakbur, who keeps the inn, will not confess that he is in debt to the Armenians, and that in reality the house belongs to them. It would be a great joy to Rascheed if all the Christians were massacred, for then the house of *The White Prophet* would be his of a truth, and Abou Ranzak would not hold his head so high.'

'Who is Abou Ranzak?'

'He is the owner of *The Crescent*, the rival inn to *The White Prophet*.'

'And which is the better of the two?'

The old man laughed.

'If you speak to Rascheed,' he said, 'he will tell you that *The White Prophet* is the only inn where a man of substance and faith can stay. If you speak to Abou, he will say that *The White Prophet* is a den of thieves and robbers.'

'And which is right?'

Again the old Nazir laughed.

'Allah is great,' he said, 'and I would not give a bishlek to choose. At present Rascheed looks with scorn on Abou, because at this moment a great lord from Aleppo hath taken up his abode at his inn.'

The two young men exchanged quick glances.

'From Aleppo?' continued the spokesman of the two. 'Not the Governor of the city, the brother of Djevdet Bey?'

'Not quite so high as that,' replied the Nazir, 'but nearly. If report speaks truly, Achma el Amad really governs Aleppo and the country round.'

'And is he at this moment staying at *The White Prophet*?'

'Two days hath he been there, and many rumours have been afloat concerning his purpose in coming. Some have it that he travelled hither to pray at the great mosque, and certainly he

hath spent much time at the tomb of the Holy Dervishes, which lies under the mosque. On the other hand, it is whispered that he hath come for other purposes, and only waits for a signal to perform other duties.'

'What duties?'

'That is not for me to say. I am but the Nazir, while the Sheikh-ul-Islam is alive. But what I ask is this—why should he bring twenty horsemen with him, armed to the teeth? When men come to pray, they do not bring a great retinue. More than that, he hath inquired diligently as to the number of dwelling-places of the Armenians. Already they have been disarmed, and now they dread deportation.'

The young Turk laughed.

'And deportation to the banks of the Tigris,' he said, 'means banishment, and—worse.'

'Dreadful stories have reached me concerning those who have been sent from Cilicia, so dreadful that even I, who hate the Armenians as Christian dogs, have shuddered at them. A sword-thrust I do not mind, drowning I do not mind; as for the outrage on the women, that also might be right, for what rights have Christian women, the daughters of an accursed race? But to send them away to slow starvation, huddled in packs, their lips and tongues parched and cracked with thirst, a slow lingering death, until the vultures pounce upon them and tear what little flesh they have upon their bones, even before they are dead, is not according to the Koran, nor to the will of the Prophet. Yet such is the truth. This I have learnt from those who have seen.'

'You are a holy man,' said the young Turk, 'you say more than your prescribed prayers, you read the Koran daily.'

'I am the Nazir of the Eed-al-Kurban. I have the Imams and the Mueddins under me; for thirty years I have served in the mosque; therefore what you say is true. But I love not butchery.'

'Still,' said the other, 'even our lord Mohammed gave forth, the cry "Death or Conversion!"'

'That is true,' replied the Nazir, 'and they make a pretence of that even to-day. But they seek not the conversion of the men, or the old women, or the little children, they seek only the

conversion of the fair maidens and what doth that conversion mean ?

‘ Yes, what ? ’

‘ It means that they are only taken to be the sport of our soldiers. They are threatened with death, and worse than death, if they will not trample on the cross and kiss the Koran, and swear to renounce the false faith of the Christian. But when some of them in madness do this, and expect the protection of the faithful as a consequence, they are given over to the pleasure of the officials and soldiers who have done the most devilish deeds.’

‘ Speak you of what you have seen, or only of what you have heard ? ’ said the young man.

‘ But ten days ago I was at Inzik, and there I saw with my own eyes ; for two nights afterwards I could not sleep, I who hate the Armenians, I who would kill them as I would kill hornets. I saw little children thrown up in the air and caught on the point of the soldiers’ bayonets. I saw old women thrown into the fire, which was made in the centre of the town, even yet the smell of their burning flesh remains in my nostrils. I saw hundreds of others sent away with only what they stood up in, to walk and walk and walk until they died, towards the desert places of Mesopotamia. I saw young men shot down as though they were so many rats.’

‘ And did you not protest ? ’

‘ I protested as much as a man may, but what could I do ? It was all done according to the order sent from Constantinople ; while the Germans—ah, the Germans ! they commanded the soldiers to shoot. They are our masters, in spite of all we say : they who conceived the scheme.’

The young man standing by his horse’s head, as well as the other who still remained in his saddle, changed colour. A ghastly pallor overspread their dark features.

‘ I speak to you freely,’ went on the old man, ‘ because, from your green turbans, I see you have taken the great pilgrimage ; but I fear greatly.’

‘ Fear what ? ’

‘ I fear lest Achma el Amad hath come to Danana for this same thing. He is chief man of the Gover or of Aleppo, and the

Governor of Aleppo is brother to Djevdet Bey, and Djevdet Bey is brother-in-law to Emir Pasha ; and Djevdet Bey's tracks have been covered with blood for many days. I have spoken to the Sheikh-ul-Islam, who hath spent much time with Achma ; but he will tell me nothing, and I fear. It may be that we at Danana have been lax, we have traded with the Armenians, we have allowed them to worship at their church without let or hindrance, we have done nothing but disarm them ; but the order hath gone forth throughout the whole of Asia Minor that every Armenian is to be driven out, and sent forth to the arid wastes of Mesopotamia. In scores of towns and villages this hath been done, and now I fear our turn is coming. That is why I wonder and fear. Already hath Achma el Amad been at *The White Prophet* for two days.'

'Why ?'

'He speaks to no man but the Sheikh-ul-Islam ; but his followers laugh, and with great oaths tell us to expect great happenings. Whispers are heard that Achma is waiting for something or some one, and then he will strike. That is why the whole town of Danana is full of fear. That is why, if you see an Armenian, he will creep around with a white face and terror in his eyes !'

'That settles my plan, then,' said the young Turk.

'What plan, my lord ?'

'I will not go to *The White Prophet*, but to *The Crescent*. Faithful as I am, I, like you, love not butchery, and I cannot sleep beneath the same roof as this man Achma el Amad.'

'Even there you will not be free from him,' replied the old Nazir, 'for some of his followers have been billeted at *The Crescent*. But I have my duties, my lord, and I must away.'

'Before you go,' said the young Turk, 'will you tell me where the inn with the sign of *The Crescent* is situated ?'

The old man pointed to a road which led away from the centre of the town. 'You cannot fail to find it,' he said, 'it is opposite the Christian Church. There is the tower,' and he pointed with his long, lean forefinger. '*The White Prophet* stands opposite the very doors of the Eed-el-Kurban, where the populace often gather of an evening.'

The young man who had acted as spokesman re-mounted his

horse and led the way to *The Crescent*, where a few minutes later they were shown to a room by Abou himself. Abou's eyes glistened when he saw the rich garments and their evident signs of wealth, and he eagerly bargained with them to pay double what he usually got for the use of the chamber.

When the two were alone, they looked toward each other with fearful glances. The one who had not spoken seemed especially to be much afraid.

'Adana, this is terrible! Let us wait until dark, and then fly.'

'Fly? Fly where?'

'Anywhere, anywhere!'

'But where? You know why we came here.'

'Yes, I know. But Victor may not come.'

'He will come, if he is not warned. We have come to warn him.'

'But how can we? He will ride here unsuspectingly, and we do not know where he is.'

Adana was silent. 'So far we have been fortunate,' she said. 'We have discovered much, and we have aroused no suspicions. Through Judah we were able to get these clothes, and horses; through him we were able to darken our faces, and look less like women.'

'And you have been wonderful, Adana,' said Urmia, half fearfully, half admiringly; 'you played the part of the young Turkish noble to perfection; so that that old man never dreamed that we were Armenian women. But even now I don't see what we can do; we are here alone, unprotected.'

'I will protect you,' was the reply of the other.

'But how? None of our people are safe. You know the Turkish orders: not one Armenian is to be allowed to remain; all are either to be butchered or sent away to that awful desert, except those who will be converted, and you know what that means.'

'Listen,' cried the girl. 'We know the worst, and we have prepared for it.'

She took a small revolver from under her tunic and looked at it intently. We will never fall into their hands, Urmia: better die a thousand times over. If the worst comes to the worst, we can use this.'

'But to kill oneself !'

'Better that than suffer the fate which so many of our people are suffering. But we will not give up hope. As yet it is evident that Victor hath not entered the town, if he had the Nazir would have heard of it.' 'You can see how plain the plot is. Achma el Amad is waiting at *The White Prophet*; he expects us to be brought to him, and he expects Victor to come to us.'

'But he may not come. Perhaps he does not expect him to come.'

'We must find out that,' was Adana's reply. 'Food will be brought to us in a few minutes, and after that I will go to *The White Prophet*; I will, if need be, see Achma.'

'But you cannot, you dare not! Oh, Adana, supposing he discovered who you were!'

'I dare anything!' cried the girl. 'He has never seen me, and I can play the part of a man. I must make sure what his plans are. I must discover whether he expects Victor here. You remember what your cousin said after he recovered from his illness, "Before one can *act*, one must *know*" and I am going to know.'

'But you will be putting yourself in his power.'

'No, I will not,' and the girl's eyes flashed fire. 'Now, Urmia, keep up your courage, remember what we have to do.'

An hour later, the people who had gathered round the great mosque of the Eed-el-Kurban turned to give a second glance at the richly dressed young Turk, who was evidently making his way to *The White Prophet*. The sun was now sinking in the west, and just as he had entered the square outside the mosque, a great cry was heard from the minaret above them. It was the Mohammedan priest calling the people to evening prayer.

'Allah Akbar Islam!'

Every other voice became hushed as the words rang out clearly in the evening air.

'God is the only God, Mohammed is His Prophet! Come to prayer! come to prayer!'

Immediately a great throng found their way into the already half-filled mosque, while many others knelt in the open square, and prayed. Travellers, pedlars, merchants of all sorts spread their carpets on the paving-stones and knelt. Some rocked

themselves in their devotions, and groaned like men in pain, others again were motionless. No women entered the mosque, and no women were in the square. It is said that Mohammed doubted if a woman had a soul, and as a consequence women do not join men, in Mohammedan countries, in public devotions ; if they pray, they pray in their own houses.

For more than a minute there was a silence. Some, even in the open square, kept their foreheads close to the ground as they prayed, while others less devotional, even while they knelt, looked around as if with curiosity and amusement, to see what their neighbours were doing.

The call to pray had come directly the lower part of the circle of the sun had touched the horizon, and the devotions continued until the upper rim of the great orb of fire was lost to sight. Then the clamour of men's tongues burst forth again. The hour of prayer was over ; the doors of the mosque were opened, and hundreds of the faithful poured forth.

The young stranger, who had knelt with the rest, watched eagerly, looking quickly from the door of the mosque to that of the inn. Presently a hush fell upon the crowd again, for coming from the mosque was Achma el Amad. People made way for him as he passed from the Eed-el-Kurban to the inn.

When he reached the middle of the square, he stopped, and gave a sign to a man who accompanied him. The man immediately spread a carpet over the paving-stone, on which Achma knelt, and remained some seconds in the attitude of prayer.

' See how pious he is ! He prays in the open street, even after he has left the mosque,' men whispered one to another.

' He is chief man of Aleppo, second only to the Governor, who is brother to Djevdet Bey, who is brother-in-law to Emir Pasha,' whispered another.

But Achma appeared to take no notice. After he had concluded his devotions in the street, he arose and went into the inn, followed by admiring eyes.

Scarcely had he reached his room, when a servant entered and told him that a young Turkish lord desired audience with him. A few seconds later, Adana Ulah stood before him.

CHAPTER XX

A WOMAN'S WIT, AND A MAN'S SUBTLETY

A CHMA gave a quick glance towards his visitor, and saw before him what appeared to him a young man about twenty-three years of age, richly dressed, a green turban round his head, and a heavy sword hanging by his side.

Immediately Achma became all smiles, and full of obsequiousness. Evidently his visitor was a young noble in high command, who, for some reason unknown to him, had come to Danana. Possibly he was an official from Constantinople, who desired to know the condition of things in Asia Minor. Or perhaps he had come from the Turkish army, which was fighting desperately against the Russians in the north. In any case, it was for him to pay due meed of honour to his distinguished visitor, and it might be that good would come of it.

'What service can I render to my lord?' he asked.

'Perhaps much, perhaps very little. I am here to know that all is going well, and that orders are being obeyed. Your name is not unknown to me, as it is not unknown to the Government in Constantinople.'

Achma's eyes gleamed with pleasure. The thought of being known in Constantinople was as sweet to him as the nectar of the gods.

'Not only hath the Governor of Aleppo spoken of your great services to that city, but Djevdet Bey hath spoken much to Emir Pasha of the faithfulness and the ability of Achma el Amad. It is pleasant to those in Constantinople to know that here in Turkey in Asia we have wise counsellors, as well as brave soldiers.'

'My lord hath doubtless friends in Constantinople, he is known personally to Emir Pasha?' said Achma with a smile, intended to be very ingratiating. 'Doubtless, if my lord were to tell me

his name, I should find that he was high in the counsels of the State.'

His visitor looked quickly around the room, and then turning to Achma, said, ' My mission is secret. I have been sent to discover and to report. As for my name, this is not a time to shout it from the house-tops. Nevertheless, when I heard that Achma el Amad was in Danana, I made my way to him quickly, for I would know all he has to tell me.'

' You are very young to be sent on important missions,' replied Achma, ' but age cannot always be reckoned by the years of one's life, but by nobility of birth, and by wisdom and experience in great affairs.'

' That is as may be,' was the reply, ' but I was much surprised to hear of Achma el Amad being in Danana. I know that, by consent of the Governor at Aleppo, he came to Djevdet Bey; that is in the records at Constantinople. But Danana is out of the beaten track from Van to Aleppo, or even from Mush or Bitlis. Doubtless Djevdet Bey has given you a secret mission ?'

Achma looked keenly at his visitor. He was flattered by the thought that his doings were recorded in Constantinople; but he liked not the idea that his secret designs should be known, neither was it pleasant to him that this young man should speak to him with an air of authority.

' I am an old man, my lord,' he said, ' for many years I have served my country faithfully. Before Abdul's dethronement my power was great, and I was trusted with important things. Even now, as you have already said, the Governor of Aleppo hath placed much power in my hands, while Djevdet Bey listens eagerly to my advice. That is why I have to be so careful. That is why, too, although I may no more doubt my lord's authority than the faithful may doubt the words of the Koran, I have to ask for papers bearing the Government seal, before I may speak freely.'

A look of anger flashed from his visitor's eyes. ' But for your long service and known faithfulness, I should regard your request as an impertinence; but remembering these things, I forgive you. I will even go so far as to satisfy your curiosity.'

Whereupon Adana took from her tunic a paper emblazoned with the Turkish arms and with the Government seal.

'Do you recognize this?' she said. 'You, who have been so long a servant of the State, will know that no man carries a paper bearing that seal without authority. Now then, speak. What do you do here?'

'Of course my lord knows what the orders from the Government are?' said Achma.

"What orders? About whom?"

'About the Armenians.'

'The three orders were,' and Adana spoke peremptorily: First, disarm all the Armenian soldiers; second, disarm all the people; third, deport all the people. In travelling through the country, I find that with the exception of certain places, such as Sassoun, this is being done.'

'It takes time,' replied Achma. 'Sassoun is the Armenian stronghold, and may hold out for months, but an army is marching against it. The people have all been disarmed, with the exception of such mountain fortresses as Sassoun. The deportation goes on.'

'With unnecessary cruelty.'

'Cruelty! My lord! But if my lord has lived in Constantinople all his life, he does not know what these Armenians are. Cunning as the devil, they fought us at every turn; voracious as tigers, they have batten on our riches; blood-thirsty as leeches, they have been sucking our life blood; now we are making them disgorge. As for the cruelty,' and Achma shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

'You may speak freely,' said the other, 'it is well that I should know all.'

'All?' and Achma smiled again.

'Yes, all.'

'Then my lord knows what the real purport of the orders from Constantinople is, knows, too, what the German advice means?'

'It is not to be shouted from the house-tops, but we are neither deaf nor blind. You mean that the country is to be rid of the Armenians, that by one means or another they are to be annihilated.'

'I see my lord understands. And what would you? The annihilation of two million people means much; these vermin are scattered everywhere, and like vermin they breed. Then,

again, we have had secret orders that the young women may be converted. Such orders lead to what men call cruelty.'

' You are speaking in vague terms,' was the reply. ' I asked you what you were doing here. Is Danana the next place on the list for deportation ? '

' My lord knows Djevdet Bey ? '

' I have seen him.'

' Djevdet Bey is a man of many projects. What would you ? I will lay bare my heart before you, and you, as a young man, will understand. Did not the Israelites spoil the Egyptians ? And may not the Sons of the faithful take the fairest daughters of an accursed race ? '

' Well, and what then ? '

' I will bid my lord remember this, while I tell him how Djevdet Bey served his country. He hath cast his eyes in favour on two Armenian maidens ; these will be brought to-night to this very inn.'

Adana laughed, as though she were pleased at such a good joke.

' He mingleth his public with his private affairs. He is a lover and a soldier at the same time.'

' What would you ? ' said Achma, ' but there is more than that. Let me tell my lord a story. Years ago, the cleverest man among the Armenians was Ibram Alexandropol.'

' I have heard the name ; but is he not dead ? '

' Ah, yes, he is dead, but he left a son, who was reared in England. That son has the poison of his father in his blood. He came to Asia Minor ; he is here still. He hath the brains of his father. He came ostensibly to take away his father's sister and her daughter ; but really to carry on Ibram Alexandropol's work.'

' But what is that to me ? There have always been plotters among the Armenians. What matters one more ? '

' Will my lord deign to listen while I tell him ? This young man, whom I saw in Aleppo, escaped from me, and he found his way to Erzerum, bearing papers which led old Talaat Bey to give him work as his private secretary. He thereby discovered all old Talaat Bey could tell, who, as you know, in spite of the fact that he no longer outwardly governs Erzerum, knows the

inmost secret plans of the Government. This young man went also to Van, where he spent much time with Djevdet Bey. He went there, you understand, as the trusted servant of Talaat Bey. Djevdet's hands were full of public matters, and he commissioned him to take these two Armenian maidens of whom I spoke to Djevdet Bey's house at the north of Lake Van.'

' And did he do this ? '

' No. Instead, he took them to Sassoun, the Armenian stronghold, after which he made his way to the Caucasus, and joined the Russian Army.'

' Joined the Russian Army ! '

' Ah, my lord may well be surprised ; but before he did so he learnt our secrets, he knew all our plans, he discovered what we intended to do, and having told the Russian general, we were out-fought, out-witted, driven from the Caucasus, and what we thought would be a great victory ended in our being routed. Then I had a secret plan ; I had discovered all this. By that plan, those two maidens are to be brought to Danana this night ; by that plan, too, this Victor Alexandropol is also to be enticed here, here to this very inn. When here, I shall know what to do with him,' and Achma laughed with evident enjoyment.'

The visitor was silent for a few seconds after this, and seemed much struck by Achma's cleverness.

' I think I see what is in your mind,' said Adana, ' but tell me what your plans are when you get them here.'

' The maidens,' said Achma, with a smile, ' must, of course, be taken to the house of Djevdet Bey ; but the man I will put to torture until he has told all he knows of the Russian plans. First, if need be, one hand will be cut off, then the other, then his eyes gouged out ; after that——' Achma shrugged his shoulders and laughed. ' Shall a man cause the Turkish army to be defeated ; shall a man deceive us, outwit us, play the spy upon us, and not suffer ? '

' The scheme is worthy of you,' said Adana ; ' you are a great man, Achma. When the present Governor of Aleppo dies, there is only one man fit to fill his place. But are you sure your plans will bear fruit ? May he not outwit you again ? '

' Pah ! I have him in the hollow of my hand. Stationed along

the roads, north, which lead to Danana, I have my watchers ; I know he is on his way, I have seen to that. Every minute I am expecting messengers to tell me he is nearing us.'

' Will he be sure to come ? '

' He swore to these maidens that, at a word from them, he would come to them, and they have sent him word ; I have seen to that.'

' And they, the maidens ? '

' They believe he hath sent them word to come here ; I have seen also to that. What would you ? From all I can gather, he is in love with one of them, and from all I can learn, both of them are in love with him.'

' Which is he in love with ? That is, you spoke just now of one being his cousin. Is it with her or the other ? '

' I know not which yet, but if my plan succeeds, when we have dealt with the three, and it was Djivet Bey's pleasure that we should get them all together, then the deportation of the Armenians from Danana will commence.'

Adana took a turn to and fro in the room, her heavy sword clanking as she walked. Every nerve in her body was tingling with excitement, but she felt no fear. For the moment the thought that Urmia was awaiting her with anxiety and fear did not trouble her. The spirit of adventure was upon her, and the knowledge that she was standing face to face with the man who, if he knew the identity of his visitor, would pounce upon her as a hungry wolf pounces upon its prey, gave zest to the conversation. She felt she was outwitting this wily Eastern, who evidently hated the man whom he expected that night. All the same, she knew that she must be careful. One false word, one false movement, might arouse suspicions, and then she would be lost. She was alone in the town without a friend, and not one hand would be lifted in defence of her if the truth came to light. Her work was to save not only herself and Urmia, but to save Victor. At any moment he might unsuspectingly come to the inn, only to find himself a prisoner. It needed only to look at old Achma's eyes to see how he gloated over the thought that two helpless Armenian girls were to be in his power, and that the man who had thwarted his projects should be made to suffer the most ghastly tortures.

She knew, too, that Achma was watching her closely while she strode to and fro in the room. It was true that the lamp-light was not strong, but she had a difficult part to play, for old Achma's mind was full of subtlety, and full of suspicion. Still, the very boldness of her project would allay suspicion. He would never think that a girl, for whom he had sent a guard so that she might be brought a captive to his presence, would come there of her own free will. In that country, Eastern women were scarcely ever known to take the initiative in any matter : they were but the chattels of men ; and even the most favourably placed women were confined within strict limits, never daring to take a step except with their lord's permission.

Knowing that, she had adopted masculine attire. This she had done by means of old Judah Mellichan, who had many resources at his command. It was through old Judah, too, that the two men who had come for her had been made captives, and their papers taken from them—papers which had been of such value to her during her interview. When she had entered Danana she had no thought of finding Achma there, but discovering his presence, she had decided upon this bold scheme. She had certain things to her advantage, too. First of all, she was more than ordinarily tall for a woman, while the turban she wore concealed the heavy masses of her black hair. She had almost a masculine way of speaking, and her contralto voice enabled her to take the part of a man without raising doubt.

'It is a great scheme,' she said, as if she was discussing an abstract question, 'but I am not sure it is so clever as you think. It might easily come to naught.'

'Wherein lies its weakness ?' asked Achma. 'Tell me wherein I have failed ; what is the weak link in the chain ? Think, think,' and he went on eagerly, 'two trusted messengers went to Sassoun, messengers who knew all the Armenian passwords and signs ; they had full authority to act ; they had complete instructions whereby they could meet every difficulty. They bore a letter purporting to come from this Victor Alexandropol, which told the maidens to fly here for safety. Circumstances bore out the advice given in the letter ; they were warned that the Turkish armies were going to attack Sassoun, which is a fact that is by this time known. The two maidens are fearful and helpless, and

they are both in love with the man who was supposed to write the letter.'

'How do you know?'

Achma laughed. 'Have I not had them watched for many weeks? Have not my inquiries been keen and searching? Pah! I know, I know.'

'It is said that these Armenian women are better educated than ours, that they have more intelligence. May they not have suspected your messengers?'

Again Achma laughed. 'Women!' he said. 'My lord is young, but even he is old enough to know that women will accept any bait which is held out when it comes from the man they love. Besides, I have taken every precaution: I have watched; I know.'

'Might they not bribe your messengers to take them elsewhere? Might they not wheedle the truth out of them?'

'I do not depend upon two messengers. Others awaited them along the road, to see that they did their duty.'

Adana seemed to be carried away by admiration. 'Achma, you are a great man,' she repeated, with a laugh. 'I would like to see these two maidens. Are they fair to look upon?'

'Fair as houris; eyes soft as those of doves; voices as sweet as that of water rippling over a stony bed.'

'Djevdet Bey hath good taste, then?'

Achma laughed. 'He is mad with love,' he said, 'otherwise,' looking meaningly at the other, 'my lord might have been interested in them, and I might have helped him.'

'Women are not for me,' and Adana assumed a careless air. 'What are they? A care and a burden, helpless and insipid. Men such as I think more of ambition. The country is passing through a crisis, and who knows what a year may bring forth. Still, let Djevdet Bey have his pleasure; in the past he served the State well, although he has bungled things lately.'

'But women have their place in life,' remarked Achma, 'and your time will come, when nothing will seem so sweet as a woman's smile. May your wives be very obedient, my lord, and may they be slow in speech, for truly a woman's tongue can be venomous.'

'Then you are expecting these women here soon?'

'By midnight to-night, at the latest, they should be here. I

have allowed for delays, for rough roads, for accidents ; but by then they should be here.'

' And you will have great reward ? '

' What would you, my lord ? ' and again Achma laughed. ' When the age of love is over, then the desire for money and power grows stronger.'

' But the women seem a small part of the game, their presence might bring you reward from Djevdet Bey ; but if the man does not come, his anger will be so great that you would get but little thanks.'

' Ah, no ! ' replied Achma, ' but the women are bait for the man, even as the man is bait for the women, and he will come. Else all that I have seen in life is a great lie.'

' You say the man is clever; that he hath the brains of his father, and if report speaks truly, Ibram Alexandropol out-witted us on every hand more than twenty years ago.'

' The wisest men are fools, where women are concerned, and I made made my plans. He will come all unsuspectingly, only to be caught in a trap, and then—do you not see ? ' and Achma went on eagerly, ' When I get him, I learn the Russian plans—he is deep in the counsels of his superiors.'

' He may be stubborn, and will not tell you.'

' I have invented tortures which will draw the truth from any man,' and Achma's eyes burned with a cruel fire. ' He hath beaten Achma el Amad once, he hath beaten him twice, but Achma el Amad has never been beaten a third time. Step by step he has been watched, and there is no link missing in the chain.'

' I wonder you did not send men to capture him, and to bring him here bound ; surely that would be the safest way ? '

' That was not my plan,' and Achma spoke vainly ; ' I use not force except at the last minute. I work quietly, stealthily. I have to out-match by wit, to overcome by subtlety.'

' I would I could stay here to see your scheme was carried out, but I have much to do, and I must away.'

' Hark ! what is that ? It is the sound of galloping horsemen,' said Achma, rushing to the window. ' It is my messenger. Will my lord wait here till I return ? ' He left the room quickly as he spoke, evidently in a state of great excitement, while Adana, with silent feet, followed.

For some seconds she listened intently, and when Achma returned she was still standing in the same place in the room as when he left her.

'Was it the messenger you expected?' she asked.

'Yes,' he replied.

'Brings he not good news?'

'He will not be here as soon as I thought,' and Achma gave his visitor a suspicious look; 'he will not arrive until to-morrow.'

'Ah! he may not arrive at all. Still, I wish you good fortune, and Allah is great. I must go now,' and she passed out of the room.

Achma sat thinking silently. 'It is not well this young beardless upstart should know too much,' he said to himself, 'in three hours Victor Alexandropol will be here; but let him think he will not arrive until to-morrow.'

Adana made her way hastily back to the inn which the people called *The Crescent*.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MEETING

'LISTEN! Is not that the sound of horses?'

There was a tense silence for a few seconds, during which nothing could be heard save the sound of a stream as it rippled down the valley. Birds and beasts had gone to rest. Great rugged, peaked hills lifted their bastions high into the sky. The night was windless, and the moon was so bright that stars did not appear.

'Yes, there it is again. There are three or four horses coming this way.'

'No, only two. It may be them, or it may be prowling Bedouins.'

'Adana, I am sure we have been watched all the way. Again and again I heard rustling among the bushes as we passed by.'

'Possibly, probably. But there is an open space here, we must ride fast. You have your revolver ready to hand?'

'Yes, but I am afraid.'

'This is no time for fear, but for action. Yes, this is the road. There are the two big olive trees of which the man spoke.'

'I am afraid to go farther, Adana; let us stop here and wait. This is an open place, and watchers can hide themselves.'

'And yet you say you love him.'

'Yes, of course I do; but this is awful.'

'Love should not know fear. When a woman loves a man, death itself should not stop her from helping him. And if he reaches Danana to-night— Oh, Urmia, come on!'

Again they stopped and listened, but this time they could hear no sound of horses. Minute after minute they waited, listening intently.

It was now several hours since Adana and Urmia had hastily left *The Crescent*, after paying Abou Ranzak more than the

amount stipulated for the apartment they had hired, on account of leaving it so suddenly. Had not Abou been on bad terms with the keeper of *The White Prophet*, he would have gone thither to inform the great man from Aleppo who was staying there that his visitors had acted strangely. But, being at daggers drawn with Racheed, he decided to say nothing. Besides, he reflected that he was well paid, and there might be no ground for suspicion.

Urmia had listened eagerly to her friend's story, and then the two had mounted their horses and ridden off.

Abou watched them intently. 'Had they been indeed Turkish lords, such as they professed to be, they would have had many servants,' he reflected, 'but who knows? We are at war, and times are changed. Besides, they paid me well.'

Adana had seen the changed look on Achma's face when he returned after seeing his messenger, and when he told her that Victor would not arrive until the next day she was not surprised. But she had not been deceived. She had heard the man tell his master that in a few hours Victor would be there. That was why she was on her way to warn him.

'There is no one here,' whispered Urmia, after they had waited and listened for some time. 'You were mistaken, or perhaps they have taken another road.'

'There *is* no other road. Hark! What is that?'

On each side of the track on which they travelled were huge rocks, which made it difficult for them to travel rapidly. The land was almost verdureless, save for olive trees, cactus bushes, and starved desert grass.

'Have your revolver ready,' she whispered, 'I am sure I hear something.'

'Hands up, or I fire!' The voice came startlingly sudden and clear in the night air, and a second later two men stood directly in their pathway, with pistols uplifted.

Urmia gave a scream, and swayed in her saddle.

'Good heavens, a woman's voice! What does this mean?'

'Take no risks! Cover them, Howajja; it may be a trick.'

'Victor! Yusef!'

'Take no risks, Howajja,' repeated Yusef; 'cover them both. I will get nearer and see.'

'Tell me who you are,' cried Victor in English.

For reply, there was half a laugh, half a sob.

'Please don't fire!' This was also said in English. 'Your cousin is here.'

A few minutes later, Adana had explained to Victor and Yusef why they were there, while the two listened in silent wonder.

'Adana,' said Victor solemnly, when he had heard all, 'you have saved our lives. It is wonderful, simply wonderful. But for you, we should have gone to Danana.'

'It was Urmia who thought of your danger,' said the girl, and her voice was unnatural as she spoke, 'she has been very brave, very wonderful.'

But Urmia did not speak. She had grasped Victor's arm, and was sobbing convulsively.

'I shall never cease to thank you,' said the young man. 'I cannot put into words what I feel.'

'How could we help coming?' said Adana. 'It was through us you were in danger. But for seeking to rescue us, you would not have taken this journey.'

'Oh, Victor,' sobbed Urmia, 'let us go, let us fly from this horrible place. That man will be sending out his soldiers, and then—'

Victor looked from one to the other quickly. The horses were nibbling at the parched desert grass.

'Where?' asked Victor.

'Oh, to some safe place! It is terrible to feel that enemies are all around you.'

'To some safe place,' repeated the young man abstractedly, for her words were more easily spoken than fulfilled. Indeed, there was no safe place. Alone, he and Yusef might save themselves; they wore Turkish uniforms, and carried Turkish papers; they were hardened by war, and were full of resourcefulness. But to rescue two helpless women presented new problems. At any moment they might be pounced upon by bands of Kurds, who infested the mountains, or by companies of soldiers passing hither and thither. It is true the girls had acted in a wonderful way, and they wore Turkish attire; but at any moment danger might beset them, and women, whatever clothes they wore, were still women. He had practically given up all hope of ren-

dering anything like help to people of his own race. During his journey southward, he had seen and heard enough to know that no Armenian was safe. Even while those nearer the Russian lines were able, by great audacity and much manœuvring, to obtain Russian protection, these cases were only rare. Everywhere vengeance was breathed out on the Armenians.

It is true he and Yusef had kept away from the towns and villages, but they could not help hearing of the frightful things that were taking place. Stories of murder, massacre, and outrage were common. Especially did the young women suffer. Old men and women were ruthlessly put to death; little children were bayoneted in their cots; but young women were commanded to be converted, and their conversion only meant a doom of shame. They were being taken away by the hundred to the houses of the Turks. No man opposed, and very few protested.

All this faced Victor Alexandropol as Urmia Erzinghan, in an almost hysterical voice, pleaded with him to take her to a place of safety. Safety! The word was a mockery to all Armenians. They were but one in ten of the population, and nine out of every ten of their conquerors looked upon them as their legitimate prey. At bottom it was a religious feud, for the Mohammedans had always at heart hated the Christians, and passions which had been lying dormant for years were now fanned into a flame again. Sheikhs in the mosques exhorted them to be faithful to the teaching of their Prophet, and faithfulness meant the destruction of Christians. The Turkish Government had commanded that no Armenian was to be allowed to remain in the fertile parts of Turkey in Asia, and behind the Turkish Government were the Germans, the real rulers of the country, who had planned this ghastly annihilation of a great and ancient people.

Thus no Armenian could be safe: they lived only from hour to hour, from minute to minute. Cruelty and suffering was their common lot. No wonder that Victor, in spite of his miraculous escape, looked into the future with gloomy eyes. His heart warmed at what had been done for him, but as he reflected on their position, a great fear filled his heart.

During the time he had been on his journey to Danana, his one thought had been to reach them at all hazards, depending

on his own wits and fortune for what might follow. But now they were with him, and the facts of life had to be faced. Old Achma el Amad would soon learn that he had been out-witted. This would sharpen his desire for revenge, and determine him to leave no stone unturned to end his defeat in victory.

Still, no thought of giving up entered his mind. He was young and strong, and had not yet learnt the meaning of the word impossible. So far fortune had been on his side ; his cousin was safe.

' We must save mother, too,' gasped Urmia, ' there are stories of terrible doings in Van, and we must go to her.'

The words, in spite of the fact that they presented new difficulties, gave him a kind of objective.

Yes, if they could get back to Van, even although Urmia and Adana had fled from this place, there might be room for hope. The heads of the American Mission were held in great respect by the Turkish authorities, and Germany had evidently given the Turks to understand that they must not arouse the anger of the Americans.

Germany, in spite of the fear of her great armies, and her mountains of ammunition, had for a long time made no headway against the armies of France and England. Even although the two latter countries had been unprepared for war, they had turned the scale at the battle of the Marne, and had driven the Germans back to the Aisne, where they held them month by month, while they were preparing new armies. The Germans, too, had ceased to bluster about an easy conquest, and had altogether changed their tone. The British blockade was tightening, and they now knew that, instead of fighting for victory, they were fighting for their lives. Hence they were exceedingly desirous of remaining on terms of friendship with the Americans. This much the Turkish papers had told him.

Yes, they would return to Van, and throw themselves on the protection of the American Mission. Through this means, he hoped that somehow or other the women might escape from the country, and be sent to England. There seemed only one chance in a million to do this, but he would try. But here another difficulty presented itself. In order to get to Van, they must pass through Danana.

Yusef, who had listened intently to all that had taken place, cried out eagerly, 'There is a mountain village on our left, master ; there is only a track by which we can get to it, but from there we can get to the main road to Van, without passing through Danana.'

'Who lives in this mountain village ?' asked Victor.

'Our own people,' replied the lad.

'But they may have been deported by this.'

Yusef hesitated a second, and then replied, 'I do not think so, Howajja. It is off the beaten track, and like Sassoun, it is hard to get at. In any case, we dare not go through Danana. If we can reach Bislek, the ladies can rest. There is a house I know of there, owned by an old woman, where they will find great comfort.'

'Are you tired ?' asked Victor, turning to the girls.

'I feel as though I should never be tired again,' replied Adana.

Four hours later, they had reached the village, where, by Yusef's good offices, Adana and Urmia were able to obtain rest, and the horses were stabled comfortably. Throughout the whole day they stayed in this village. It was only a mountain encampment, where perhaps a hundred people lived, but to Victor it was an oasis in the desert. The people lived on the little farms which the Armenians had cultivated through the centuries. Being far away from the beaten tracks, they had been unmolested by the Turks. Even the marauding Kurds had left them alone, and although the lives of the people must have been lonely beyond words, they were not lacking in comfort. A modest little church had been built, and comparative cleanliness prevailed.

Even here, however, they had heard of what had taken place in other parts of the country, and they were in a state of great apprehension lest the Turkish authorities should seek them out, and cause them to suffer the same fate as their brethren in other places.

The sun was lowering in the western sky as they left Bislek and made their way towards the road which led towards the northern shores of the great Lake Van. As may be imagined, Victor's plans were utterly confused and unpromising. He had no reason to believe that in going to Van he would be in greater safety than in any other part of the country ; remembering

that Djevdet Bey was Governor of Van, he seemed like a man putting his head into the lion's mouth. On the other hand, however, the very daring of the idea might help him. Djevdet would not believe that he would return to the town where, to all appearance, he would be in the greatest possible danger. Neither, for that matter, would he imagine that Victor would ever think of bringing Adana and Urmia there.

He also had great faith in the power of the American flag, knowing the German desire to be on good terms with the Americans, and remembering that the Turks would do nothing without German consent, he believed that the American Mission might prove a sanctuary. He called to mind the boast which John Lincoln had made, that wherever the American flag floated, there was safety. He hoped that Urmia's mother had taken refuge in the Mission, and that, could he once get there, there might be some respite from their troubles.

Meanwhile, there was comfort in the thought that as yet no harm had happened to them, and that he was by their side as their helper and friend. He did not reason with himself as to why his anxiety for their welfare was almost feverish, neither did he ask himself why he so seldom thought of Ethel Tregenna. Months before, the Cornish girl had been the great object of his thoughts, the centre of every picture he drew ; but now she had become shadowy and unreal. She did not occupy a place in the foreground of his life, but was only a dim figure in the background. Neither did he find joy in the idea of some day going back to England to claim her. He had never definitely spoken to her, asking her to be his wife, and yet in a way he could not understand he believed that Ethel felt towards him as he had felt towards her. But he did not think of these things now. His work was to take Adana and Urmia back to Van, and hope for the best.

Had he known what had taken place in that town since he left it, he would have fled in an opposite direction. But he did not know. Even while he was travelling towards it, the Armenians in Van were realizing to the full the savagery of their oppressors. Djevdet Bey, who had gone to the north believing that the Turkish armies would drive back those of the Russians, had had to return southward, his hopes unrealized, his plans

destroyed. He had found himself out of favour with the authorities at Constantinople, and had been blamed for the disasters which had happened to the Turkish people.

Therefore, on his return to Van, he had wreaked his mad anger upon the Armenian Christians. The American Mission, in which Victor had centred his hopes, was at that time in a state of siege, while the Armenians to whom they had given shelter were trembling for their lives. Thousands had fled hopelessly and aimlessly to the mountains, thousands had been massacred, while hundreds of the young women had suffered the fate at which Adana and Urmia trembled.

But he knew nothing of this, and so, on the evening of the day they had arrived at Bislek, they started on their journey towards the great lake.

Just as the sun was setting, they saw travelling towards them a company of horsemen. As far as they could judge, there were five. The light was now getting dim, and in the distance they were not able to distinguish who or what they were.

'Turks or Kurds,' cried Yusef, as he gazed steadily in the direction from which they were coming, 'it is a fight, master.'

'Not if we can help it,' replied Victor.

'There are but five,' urged the lad, 'and the ladies have revolvers.'

'But why should we fight? We are all dressed like Turks.'

'As you will, master,' replied Yusef. 'But we have to remember that every man's an enemy, and that these men are possibly going to Bislek with orders from the Government.'

'At any rate,' replied Victor, 'we cannot turn back, they have seen us, and if they note any kind of fear in our behaviour, it will arouse their suspicions. We must be prepared for whatever happens.'

Victor cast a quick glance at the girls as he spoke, and could not help but notice the difference in their demeanour. Urmia was trembling convulsively, and was as pale as death; Adana, on the other hand, sat her horse resolutely, and seemed to be ready for any emergency. This fact gave the young man comfort in spite of himself. She, at all events, would be no burden to him in the case of trouble, and the more he had thought of her journey from Sassoun, and of her interview with Achma el-

Amad, the more he realized the difficult part she had had to play and the wonderful courage she had manifested. He, who had prided himself upon his foresight, had been on the point of riding into Danana, where he would have been immediately made a prisoner. Adana had, by her quick wit and resourcefulness, seen through the wily old Turk's plans, and had beaten him at his own game.

A few seconds later Adana spoke to him, almost in a tone of rejoicing. 'Those are not Turks,' she said, 'they are not travelling Turkish fashion.'

'Not Turks!' replied Victor. 'What can they be, then? Who but Turks would be alone in a place like this?'

'Germans!' cried Yusef, who had been watching them eagerly.

'No,' replied Adana, 'I do not believe they are Germans. Germans do not go into the lonely places; they remain in the towns, where much money is to be made, and where they direct the actions of the Turks. Victor, they are English! Look again.'

Victor strained his eyes to watch the oncomers in the fast-fading twilight, and he saw that she was right. They were not Turks, and they had the appearance of English people.

A minute later he was staring with eyes filled with astonishment, for one of the party who came towards them was no other than the young man from whom he had parted at Van months before.

'John Lincoln!' he cried.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PLAN OF ACTION

FOR some seconds the young American looked at the newcomers in astonishment. He could not understand a band of young Turks speaking to him in English. They were in one of the wildest spots of Asia Minor: no house was to seen, great rugged hills towered around them. The countryside was treeless, and almost verdureless. The track which they were following was but little used, and he was wondering whether, seeing they were so far from human habitation, they would not have to spend their night in the open air in a wild mountainous district. For days he had been travelling, and none of the people he had passed knew any language save that of the Turks. Indeed, but few Turks in Asia Minor knew English, and therefore to hear his name spoken with a perfect English accent astonished him.

Still, the young American spoke very quietly in reply.

' You are right,' he replied, ' John Lincoln is my name, but it beats the band how you got to know it.'

' Do you not remember me ? '

' Shouldn't know you from Adam, if he were to appear here. Not that I expect to see the old man, for I am told his grave is somewhere down by Jerusalem. But I am greatly flattered, all the same. I must be more renowned than I thought.'

' Look again,' said Victor eagerly, and with a tone of relief in his voice; ' do you not recognize any of us ? '

' My eyes are supposed to be fairly good,' said John Lincoln, ' but I cannot claim to have that honour. However, I am glad to see you, for it may be that you can help us.'

' Help you ? How ? '

' I am afraid I have acted foolishly. If I had been a wise

man, I should have stopped at a little town about two hours back, where, at any rate, we could have had shelter for the night. But the place was so confoundedly dirty that I said I would risk going on to the next village that appeared in the map I have got here, but it seems to me the map is all wrong, there ain't no village. Still, now I come to think of it, I had rather sleep in the open air than in that so-called town yonder. There was a promise of too much company in the beds,' and John laughed whimsically. 'Evidently I have gone out of my way,' he continued, 'for this village of Bislek is nowhere visible.'

'We have just come from there; it is only an hour behind us.'

'And is there food for man and beast there? But tell me, Mr. Turk, first of all, who are you, and how you know English so well.'

'As for my knowing English,' replied Victor, 'I was born in England, so I ought to know my own language; as for who I am, my name is Victor Alexandropol.'

'Gee! that's a go—so you are! But I would never have recognized you. What are you doing in that unholy attire in this unholy country, and, if I might make bold to ask, where are you going?'

Victor hesitated a second before replying. To meet this young American here in the loneliness of the mountains seemed so wonderful to him that he was hardly able to collect his thoughts.

'We were on our way to Van,' he said.

'Van!' replied the American. 'Van is hell, that is, hell to everybody except Turks. But, great heavens! surely I am not mistaken! Aren't those the two ladies who lived in Van? Isn't that Miss Erzinghan, and isn't the other Miss Ulah? I say!'

'You may well be surprised,' said Victor. 'I have a strange story to tell you. But what do you mean by saying that Van is hell?'

'Can you tell me anything about my mother?' cried Urmia, before Lincoln could reply.

'Your mother was safe when I left Van, Miss Erzinghan,' replied John. 'She is like hundreds of others, living under the protection of the American flag, right in the Armenian quarter of Van. We have had some doings there, I can tell you, and I

am now on my way to Erzerum, where I am told some of the Turkish big-wigs are, where I propose to tell a little of my mind. I have had to take a roundabout road, that is more roundabout than I should otherwise have thought necessary ; for I can tell you that these Turkish soldiers are no angels, and we haven't had a happy time, although up to now my American papers have been of considerable value to me. I guess you haven't found life a picnic, either ?' and he looked questioningly from one to the other.

Victor led the young American a few yards away and rapidly told his story, while Lincoln's eyes, in spite of his evident determination to keep cool, grew wider and wider with astonishment.

'I guess that's the pluckiest thing two women ever did !' was his remark when Victor had finished his story. 'Let me congratulate you,' and he looked admiringly towards the girls, 'but for God's sake, don't go near Van !'

'But what can we do ?' asked Victor. 'We cannot get out of Asia Minor ; the whole country swarms with Turkish spies, and no Armenian is safe. As for the Armenian women——'

'Great Scott ! don't mention it,' said John. 'I nearly lose my head when I think of it.. I say, Alexandropol, these women must be saved ; I tell you they must. It would be—it would be worse than—no, by heavens, we must keep them from that doom ! And you can't keep up this masquerading long ; you will be found out. As for that Mr. Achma el Amad, he will be on your track. There is Providence in our meeting this way ; I don't see how I am to help you yet, but there's Providence in it.'

'I don't see much signs of Providence anywhere,' and Victor spoke somewhat bitterly. "A whole race is being exterminated ; hell is let loose. I did not believe the imagination of man could have conceived the tortures which are being inflicted upon my people.'

'I shall have something to tell you about that presently,' said John Lincoln, 'but the thing now is to save those girls. Ay, and that reminds me——'

'Reminds you of what ?'

'Why, at that dirty little town we passed through the people were in a state of excitement. They had received orders to

search for and arrest two young Turkish nabobs. I did not pay much attention to it at the time, but now I understand. Mr. Achma el Amad is at work, and every town for miles round will have got instructions. I say, those women are quick-witted, and I am one who believes in trusting to a woman's intuition rather than to a man's reasoning. For the moment I don't see my way out of it. Let us ask them.'

'Look here, Miss Erzinghan,' he went on, 'we are up against a stiff proposition, but I needn't enlarge on that, you know well enough how things stand. Don't you run away with the idea that we are going to let any harm happen to you: we are not. We are going to carry you through this business, whatever happens. But for the moment I don't see my way clear. Meanwhile, I guess your brains are cleverer than ours. If they weren't, you wouldn't have been here, and Mr. Victor Alexandropol wouldn't have been here. So now, have you anything to suggest? You mustn't go in the direction of Van; and the question is, where can you go?'

Urmia was a few seconds before replying. 'As long as mother is safe, and as long as Victor is near to help me, I don't think I am afraid,' she replied.

'Your mother is as safe as any Armenian woman can be in this accursed country,' John replied, 'and I know that our people down at the American Mission will stand by her to the last, but you mustn't go there, that is settled. I know it is easy to say what you mustn't do; the thing is to say what you must do, and that's where I feel myself a blockhead.'

'Mr. Lincoln,' said Adana, 'your American women travel freely everywhere, don't they?'

'I guess they do,' replied John. 'Some of our lady missionaries have gone all over this God-forsaken country of yours; they have hustled around freely, and as far as I know no harm happened to them.'

'Just so,' replied Adana. 'And you say you are on your way to Erzerum, to speak to the Turkish authorities there?'

'That is so. Things have been so bad, and Djevdet Bey has been such a devil, that my chief thought I might do a bit of good by going to Erzerum, and, if need be, to Constantinople. As it happens, some of the big German wigs are in Erzerum just now,

and it was thought if I placed the whole case before them I might do some good. That is the reason why I and my old friend Joshua Gray are here.'

'And the others are your servants?' said Adana eagerly.

'That is so.'

'Are they faithful?'

'I'd trust them with my life.'

'Then,' said Adana eagerly, 'let us go with you.'

'That would not do, while you are in that attire, Miss Ulah.'

'No,' replied the girl, 'but at Bislek, at the house where we stayed, we can get women's clothes. I am clever with my fingers and I could make them up to look like the dresses of American ladies. Could not Victor get some clothes similar to yours, and then we could be a part of your deputation to Erzerum?'

'Holy Moses, that's great!' replied John. 'But let me think a minute.'

The sun had now gone down, and the whole western sky was ablaze with a golden glow. The mountain-tops, too, caught the reflection of the sky, and peak after peak seemed on fire.

Even Victor, full as his mind was of the difficulties which beset him, could not help being influenced by the wondrousness of the scene. Away in the east the moon was rising, shedding its silver light as if it would rival the glory of the king of day. The country-side no longer looked bare and verdureless; it was as though the Almighty wanted to atone for the barrenness of the mountains, by painting them in wondrous colours. A great silence pervaded everything; not a habitation was near. Bird, and beast, and flower seemed to have gone to rest. It was difficult to imagine, there in the solemn grandeur of the evening, that the whole country reeked with blood, that cruelties unnameable were being committed, and that hundreds of God's creatures day by day were being sacrificed at the altar of man's lust.

But John Lincoln thought of none of these things. He went away a little distance from the others, because he could think best when alone. He was trying to see his way through the problem which had so suddenly presented itself before him.

'Victor, Victor!' said Urmia. 'Do you think there is any hope? Anyhow, you will not leave us, will you?'

Victor laughed. 'Don't fear, Urmia,' he said; 'I begin to see

daylight. That was a great scheme of Adana's. It will be a wonderful opportunity for knowing everything, too.'

'How?' asked Adana.

'Why, don't you see? Lincoln is going to Erzerum, to see the Turkish authorities. I will ask him to let me accompany him. Questions will have to be asked and answered, and in that way I shall be able to learn something of what is in their minds.'

'But would not that be madness? Talaat Bey will be there, and the Governor of Erzerum: they would recognize you.'

Victor laughed. The prospect of definite action, and the hope of overcoming difficulties, had raised his spirits. His mind no longer faced a blank wall. Action had become necessary, and hope soared triumphant.

'I say, Alexandropol,'—it was Lincoln who spoke.

'Yes,' replied Victor, going towards him.

'I say, that's a big scheme of that Miss Ulah. It's the women who take the biscuit the whole time; I reckon it can be done.'

'You are willing, then? Remember, if we are found out, it might go hard with you.'

'I guess that isn't a matter for consideration. I tell you, if anything were to happen to me, there would be a big row in Washington. President Wilson may want to sit on the fence, but my people are known in America, and I bear a name that can't be played with. No, no, that doesn't trouble me one bit.'

'What does trouble you, then?'

'Carrying this scheme through; for I say, Alexandropol, those women must be unharmed; not a hair of their heads must be touched. I can see my way nearly through the whole of the plan, but not quite all.'

'What is bothering you?'

'Well, I can manage you all right. You and I are pretty much of a size, and I have a spare suit of clothes in my kit yonder that'll just fit you up to a nicety. As for your man Yusef, he can remain what he is, your servant; no questions will be asked about him. The girls say that they can rig themselves up with clothes—probably they can. Miss Ulah seems a girl who can do anything. People may say what they like about Eastern women being helpless, but that girl could even give points to

a go-ahead American girl reared in New York. She has got pluck enough for anything, and a quick mind into the bargain. She must be a good actress, too, or she would never have done what she has done. But it's just there where I'm licked.'

'How?'

'Well, you see, she only knows very little English. When it comes to talking it, she'd be found out in a moment. Some of these Germans may want to talk with them, and then the fat will be in the fire.'

'Yes, I see that,' replied Victor, 'but they both know enough English to understand what we say in that language. As for the rest, we must see to it that they take no part in any conversation.'

'Anyhow,' said Lincoln, 'we'll have a shot at it, and I guess we'll make things hum. That's settled, then. You say that there's not a house between here and Bislek?'

'Not one.'

'And the Bislek people are Armenians?'

'It is an Armenian village. They have treated us with great kindness, and we have been there all night.'

'That's good. Say, Alexandropol, it's a big thing we have got in hand, but we must carry it through.'

Two hours later they were, much to the surprise of the inhabitants of Bislek, back in that village again. The Armenian priest who had bidden them God-speed a few hours before now listened with eagerness to their new plans, and heartily supported Adana's scheme that the two girls should try to pass themselves off as Americans. It was really the weak link in their chain, but they knew that nothing could be accomplished without risk, and as John Lincoln and Joshua Gray heartily supported it, they eagerly set to work to make preparations.

The old woman at whose house Adana and Urmia had slept possessed some women's garments, which were easily made presentable. Their great difficulty was head-gear; but Adana contrived, with clever fingers, to make two very passable ladies' toques. As for Victor, he was very easily fitted out. As John Lincoln had said, the two were very nearly of the same build, and the American's spare suit fitted him not at all badly. It is true he had to wear a fez, but that would attract no attention, as it was

by no means uncommon for Europeans and Americans to adopt the Turkish head-dress.

By noon the following day, therefore, they had left Bislek, and were on their way to Erzerum. No one who had seen the two girls, when they had masqueraded as young Turks, would have recognized them now. Their swarthy skin had been changed to its original tint; their gay uniform had been left in the old Armenian woman's house. Their horses, instead of being bedecked with the elaborately fitted saddles of the young Turkish lord, now only carried a simple affair which had been converted into ladies' side-saddles. In short, to all appearances it was only a party of Americans who, in troublous times, were travelling through Turkey-in-Asia.

Again and again John Lincoln examined the party critically, and at length seemed well satisfied. Especially was this the case when, after passing a body of Turkish soldiers, no special suspicion seemed to be aroused. It is true the Turkish captain examined John's papers very closely, but they were so clearly those of an American that no awkward questions were asked.

'Yes,' said John, when they were out of hearing, 'we've done the trick. I don't say that you girls are typical Americans, but you play the part very well, and while you keep quiet, we have got them.'

'We shall need all our coolness, anyhow,' said Victor, 'for if this map is right, we shall have to spend the night in Gopal, which is a fairly big town some miles farther on.'

'According to my map,' said John Lincoln, 'we shall have to cross the Euphrates before we get there, and that may be no light matter.'

'That will be easy, Howajja,' said Yusef, 'there's a bridge across the river; I have gone over it more than once.'

'Tell you what,' said John to Victor, 'that lad of yours is a walking encyclopædia. He's an intelligent lad, too, and seems to think the world of you.'

'I owe almost everything to Yusef,' replied Victor, and he related incident after incident where, through Yusef's cleverness and knowledge of the country, his plans had been saved from disaster.

Soon after this, their road led them down a steep hill towards

the valley through which the river ran. Here they came upon a rich, fertile, cultivated country. Great tracts of land were green with shoots of young corn which had been lately sown. Cattle, too, were feeding upon rich, luscious grass, while the whole valley was dotted with dwelling-places.

When they came up to these little houses, however, a great fear possessed them all. Signs were evident that the Turks had been at work. Near one little house they saw the bodies of two children. Evidently they had been stabbed, for their clothes were blood-stained. The little house was in disorder, and had evidently been rifled with ruthless hands. Ashes were cold in the fire-place.

'This looks bad,' said John. 'I am afraid we are entering a dangerous piece of country.'

Neither of the girls spoke a word, but they drew their horses nearer to those of the men, as if seeking protection.

After they had crossed the Euphrates, by means of a roughly-constructed bridge, they saw another sight which explained the dead bodies of the two children, and which told them that the German plan was being rigorously carried out. Crawling along the valley, near the river, they saw a company of bedraggled men, women, and children, guarded by a number of Turkish soldiers. They had evidently travelled some distance, for they limped as they walked, and more than one left bloody foot-marks. Some of the women were carrying little babies. The men were nearly all of them old; on their faces was a look of sad resignation. Some of the women were sobbing bitterly.

'The same old game,' whispered John to Victor; 'deportation, they call it, but in reality it is murder. These people will never live to see Mesopotamia, and even if they do, they will be only starved to death when they get there.'

One thing struck them as strange. Four girls were seated on horseback, and seemed to have special treatment.

'They are all Armenians,' whispered Adana hoarsely.

'Say,' said Lincoln to the man who was evidently the commander of the guard, 'what does this mean?'

The Turk looked at him some seconds before replying, and then he noticed that on the head of the pack-mule was a small American flag.

' You are Americans ? ' he asked.

' That is so,' said John. ' I am on my way to Erzerum, with my friends here. I come from the American Mission in Van, and I am going to see some members of the Turkish Government. What are you doing with these people ? '

The Turk shrugged his shoulders. ' They are not safe here,' he said. ' My people are very angry with the Armenians, so the Government is sending them to Mesopotamia until the trouble is over ; then, when their anger has gone down, they will be brought back again.'

The man said this as though he were repeating a lesson.

' And what of these ? ' asked John, pointing to those who sat on horseback. He saw that the faces of these young girls were pale as death, and there was a look of terror in their eyes.

The Turk laughed. ' They have got to be converted to the true faith,' he said ; ' after that, who knows ? ' and he shrugged his shoulders.

An old man crept up to John's horse. ' Help, Howajja,' he said in a hoarse whisper. But before the American could reply the Turk lashed him cruelly with his whip.

' Get on,' he said, ' or you will have some cold steel into you.'

The party stood and watched while the sad procession went on. But they could do nothing. Four of them were still in danger of suffering the same fate themselves.

' And this hellish business is going on all over this part of the Turkish Empire ! Down farther south there are simply hundreds of thousands of them drifting, drifting to their death, ay, and worse than death. This is what German rule is doing in Turkey. They have killed thousands outright, but these are suffering a lingering torture, God help them ! '

The young American spoke the truth. All they had seen was only suggestive of what was going on farther south.

' It is hell, hell on earth ! ' said John Lincoln. But had he known what they would witness within the next twenty-four hours, he would have thought but little of the dreary procession which wended its way down the valley of the Euphrates.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

IT was after dark when they reached the town of Gopal, where, after some inquiries, they were shown into the only inn in the place which offered sufficient accommodation for the party. All of them were weary beyond words by the day's travel, while the constant nerve-tension had tired them more than mere physical fatigue.

The keeper of the inn had eyed them suspiciously as they entered, but as the Turkish official had set his signature to the papers which John showed as they entered the town, he gave them bed and board without question. The young men could not help noticing, however, that an air of excitement pervaded the place. The laughter and street-cries common to Turkish towns were not heard. People walked around the dimly-lit streets as if filled with apprehension. Crowds of men stood here and there talking, not loudly, as was their custom, but in hoarse whispers.

But although John Lincoln asked repeatedly whether anything uncommon had happened, he received no satisfactory reply. The two girls had, after a hasty meal, gone to their room, while Victor and John only remained a few minutes alone discussing their plans for the morrow. What had happened to Yusef they did not know. As for the other servants, they had thrown themselves on some straw in the stable as soon as they had partaken of food.

Both Victor and John fell asleep almost immediately, and it seemed to them both that they had only been in bed a few minutes, when they found themselves being shaken vigorously.

'Get up, Howajja! Get up quickly!'

'What is the matter?' asked John.

'If we leave at once, we leave without trouble.' It was Yusef

who spoke, and it was easy to see that the lad was greatly excited. 'There are to be terrible doings here to-day,' he went on feverishly; 'all the Armenians are to be driven out of the town. As soon as the Sheikh has finished calling the people to morning prayer, they are to be rounded up in the big square outside the mosque, and deported to Mesopotamia. I have heard the Turks talking about it. The reason why they would say nothing last night was that they did not want the Armenians to know, for not one is to escape.'

The young men, only partially undressed, jumped out of bed quickly, and threw on their remaining garments.

'If we go at once,' whispered Yusef, 'they will not molest us. Every one will rush to the square, and we shall get away unnoticed.'

'But there is no danger of our being molested,' replied the young American.

'God only knows,' said Yusef, 'they may discover that we are Armenians, and then—'

He did not finish the sentence. Evidently the terror of what he had heard laid hold of him.

'Look here, Alexandropol,' said John, 'I want to see this. It will be ghastly, I know, but it may be that good will come of it. After all, the Germans may not be as black as they are painted, if—if—'

'Yes,' said Victor, 'what? Go on.'

'I don't know,' replied John, 'but I have a morbid desire to see. It may do no good, either, to awaken those girls just now, so let them sleep while they may. The innkeeper has no doubt that they are American citizens, so he won't harm them.'

While he spoke, they heard a loud cry, which pierced the morning air. It was the Sheikh calling the people to prayer.

'Allah Akbar Islam! Allah is great! Mohammed is His Prophet! Come to prayer! Come to prayer!'

The words were repeated again and again, and immediately there was a sound of many footsteps in the streets. After that there was a silence for a few minutes, while the faithful Mohammedans bowed their heads to the ground, and prayed to the God they knew.

By the time Victor and John Lincoln found themselves in the

streets the people were coming out of the mosques. Their morning devotions were over. They had prayed according to their usual custom, that Allah would smile upon them, and that their enemies might sink in the pit of flame.

A few minutes later the whole town was alive with excitement: men, women and children thronged the streets, making their way eagerly towards the great square outside the mosque. It might have been some gala day, so eager and excited were they. Especially were their eyes turned in the direction of the Armenian quarter.

A little later cries of protest and of pain were heard. Men were gesticulating wildly, women were screaming, little children crying bitterly. Down the street they came towards the square, accompanied by Turkish soldiers. Houses were broken into, and the inhabitants forcibly ejected. Not one Armenian house in the town escaped. At the end of an hour, perhaps three hundred men, women, and children, with white faces and fear-stricken eyes, stood huddled together.

The Sheikh stood on some steps in front of the mosque, as if waiting to address them. Soldiers stood around with their bayonets fixed and their rifles loaded.

'Thank God the girls are not here,' said John to Victor, as they stood watching.

Victor made no reply. His eyes were riveted on the fearful-looking crowd, which was hemmed in on every side by the Turks, who watched them, some wonderingly, some with a look of pity in their eyes, but mostly with an expression of hatred on their faces.

Presently it seemed as though the work of rounding up all the Armenian Christians were completed, and that every Armenian house had been visited and its inhabitants ejected. Cries and prayers had been of no avail. Those who had resisted had been flogged into submission, or forced into the square at the point of the bayonet. Many of the younger men were bleeding profusely.

As we have said, about three hundred of them were huddled together, for Gopal was but a small town, and the Christian population was not large. The Turkish soldiers stood around, laughing and joking with their comrades. It would seem as though

they were pleased with their morning's work, and they waited for what might follow with evident eagerness.

Standing on the steps beside the Sheikh several Turkish officials had gathered, while a man in European attire, evidently of Teutonic birth, stood with them. The Sheikh held some papers in his hand, which were evidently of an official nature. He whispered to those at his side, and then prepared to address the crowd of frightened, trembling people, who were hemmed in on every side by the Turkish populace.

The men on the great stone steps had evidently been preparing for this time with great care. The old Sheikh fingered his documents, and looked around among the crowd as if to impress them with a sense of his dignity. In the eyes of all of them, save that of the German, was a look of wild fanaticism ; but this German gazed on the crowd half-stolidly, yet with a look in his eyes which might suggest doubt as to whether what was being done was wise. But there was no expression of mercy anywhere.

The old Sheikh lifted his hand, as if to command silence.

' Allah is great ! Mohammed is His Prophet ! Allah is the only God, and Mohammed, the latest and greatest of his prophets, is the one to whom He hath revealed His will. It is with pity in my heart that you, who are followers of the false prophet, should not have seen your errors, and embraced the true faith. For many years the Armenians have been a great trouble to God's chosen people, and at this time, when we are at war, your naughtiness has troubled the Turkish Government very greatly. You have betrayed the faithful into the hands of the enemy, and have aroused the anger of God's chosen people towards you. That is why you are not safe here, and why it has been determined to send you away to a part of the country where you will be free from peril, and where, until the present trouble is over, you can rest in peace and security. Away southward, where the sun is warmer than it is here, there are beautiful stretches of land through which the great river flows, where you can dwell in safety. Believe me, this is for your good. Your weapons of all sorts were taken away from you, so that you should not, in a fit of anger, turn against God's faithful ones and raise their anger against you.

'Now, my children, I hope you will go away quietly, and that there will be no trouble. These kind soldiers, faithful followers of Allah, will be with you on your journey, and see that you want nothing. And to show how kind and good we are to you, we give you the opportunity of embracing the true faith. Whoever will trample upon the cross, and kiss the Koran, and swear eternal allegiance to the true faith and to God's chosen country, shall be allowed to remain, when we are sure your conversion is sincere. So, if there be any who will accept our great bounty to you, and give up a false religion, will you hold up your hands.'

He waited a few seconds after this, but no hand was held up.

'Ah,' went on the old Sheikh, like one deeply pained, 'you are like Pharaoh of olden times, your hearts are hardened, and you will not hear the voice of God. Now then, get ready to start, for before you go you must lay down everything that is not necessary to you on the journey. You will leave all your money behind and all unnecessary clothing.'

At this there were murmurs of anger amongst the little crowd in the centre of the square.

'If we go away like that, we go away to starve,' cried one.

'Why should we leave our money behind?' said another.

'There are women here with children not a week old,' cried others; 'they cannot walk, and many of the little children are sickly.'

'Ah,' said the Sheikh, 'I will see who of you can remain behind; but remember, those who remain behind must be converted.'

He made a sign to the Turkish soldiers, who immediately went into the crowd, and drew aside some thirty or forty young girls, who were led up close to the steps where the old chief was.

'Now then, my dears,' said the old man, with a cruel leer in his eyes, 'you will trample on the cross, won't you? You will kiss the Koran, and embrace the true faith? It will be better for you if you do; in this life you shall dwell among the faithful, and perhaps—who knows?—if you have souls, Allah may allow you to dwell in Paradise. But if you do not, you will go to the pit of doom.'

The girls stood trembling, but not one of them made a movement as if to obey the behest of the Sheikh.

'Come now, I command you,' said the old man. 'Here is

the Koran, the book of God, kiss it, and swear to renounce the false faith.'

Still not one obeyed. A Turkish soldier seized one of them by the arms, and with a hoarse laugh dragged her towards two pieces of wood placed in the form of a cross, which lay before the stone steps.

'Trample on it! trample on it!' he yelled.

The girl looked at him boldly. 'Never!' she cried.

'If you will not, then——' and he uttered a terrible threat.

The anger of the young men in the crowd of Armenians was becoming greater all the time, and one young fellow, when he saw the Turk throw his arms around the girl, rushed up, and struck the man with a mighty blow. A second later he fell to the ground with two bayonet thrusts in his body.

This was a signal for what followed. Five minutes later the square was a shambles. Little children were ruthlessly murdered, old men and women were trampled beneath the heels of the infuriated Turks. Their clothes were torn from their bodies; the money which some of them had brought with them was taken from them. Blood flowed freely. Cries of terror and pain were heard on all hands, and in a few minutes at least half the victims were killed. All the while the German who stood on the step looked on, and made no sign.

'Great God! I can't stand this,' said Lincoln; 'it is too hellish. I must go to those fellows and protest.'

Victor held his arm as if in a vice. 'Stop!' he whispered hoarsely. 'Do not be mad. Any action on our part will only make it worse for *them*. Those devils have been looking at us, and talking about us; I am sure they have. I have watched them.'

'But I am an American citizen,' said John. 'I shall protest in the name of humanity and civilization.'

'Yes, and if you do,' whispered Victor hoarsely, 'they will wreak their vengeance upon us; and what is more, they will find out that Adana and Urmia are Armenians, and then, God help them!'

For, at that moment, Victor knew the truth of his heart, knew that he loved Adana Ulah more than his own life; realized that his one-time love for Ethel Tregenna was only a boyish fancy, and that this love, which had been born amid strife and danger

and peril, was the love of his manhood, which would never die. He did not apprehend what it meant, he did not think of what it would result in, he only knew that Adana must be saved, and that Urmia, his cousin, must never be subjected to the horrors which these people now suffered.

' You are right,' was John Lincoln's reply; ' but, great God in heaven, think of it! I have seen ghastly things before, but nothing like this.'

And he spoke the truth; for deeds were committed which I cannot set down here; deeds born in hell, deeds inspired by devilry and hatred, and lust. Not one of the young men was allowed to live. The excuse for murdering them was that they had openly opposed the law and order, and ought to die. But their fate was merciful compared with that of the young women who had been singled out for conversion.

' Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life,' is a saying which has become proverbial in our language; but those Armenian girls falsified it that day. They suffered the cruellest form of torture rather than renounce their faith in Christ which their people had held amid stress and storm through centuries.

Naturally both men and women fought for liberty and for life; they pleaded, they prayed, they struggled, all to no avail, and their slightest endeavours to defend their children was met with the vilest forms of brutality and torture.

It was over at last. The ghastly holocaust had come to an end. Out of the three hundred who had been driven into the square, two hundred were dead. The remainder, bruised, bleeding, fearful, bewildered, had lost all powers of opposition; flesh and blood could bear no more, and they found themselves driven out of the town, leaving their little homes and their household gods behind them, leaving, too, the dead bodies of their loved ones. Those who had been wounded too badly to travel were killed, and the rest, hopeless, helpless, and almost naked, were driven away to their doom.

' See what you get by disobedience,' said the old Sheikh. ' If you had obeyed in the first case, this need not have happened. See that you give no trouble on your journey. If you do, you know the fate you will suffer. But you have lifted up your hands

against your protectors ; you have defied the children of Allah.'

The square was slippery with blood ; it was hideous with the mangled forms of the victims ; and all the while the German officials, the apostle of Kultur, had stood by consenting to everything.

Victor kept his trembling hand upon John's arm, and dragged him away into a filthy, forsaken street.

'I am physically sick ; I feel faint with horror,' said the American.

Victor did not reply, but his face was drawn with agony. 'Let us get out of this,' he said. 'I thank God *they* have not been here ; they have not seen. Let us hope and pray they know nothing.'

'Yes,' said John, 'we must get away if we can.'

'Can !' and Victor's voice was hoarse as the whispered word escaped his lips. 'We must ! The Turks would never have done this had they been left alone ; this is worse than the days of Abdul the Damned, and it has been inspired by the Germans. With one nod of his head, that man could have stopped this hellish business. But he never moved. The German officials in Constantinople could put an end to the whole business ; but they consent to it, and encourage it. But we must not speak a word at the inn. We must not make it known that we have seen anything or heard anything, and we must get *them* away.'

Strange as it may seem, while these scenes had been enacted in the public square, while the newly-risen sun shone upon mangled corpses and outraged humanity, old Joshua Gray and the two girls had been sleeping peacefully. They knew nothing of the tragedy which had been enacted a few hundred yards away. The cries of the wounded and dying had not reached their ears. It was well for them that it was so.

Two hours later those who still survived were toiling painfully towards the valley of the Euphrates, while John Lincoln, followed by his friends, and each of their horses' heads bedecked with the American flag, rode out of Gopal in the opposite direction. Again John's papers had saved them. In spite of the lawlessness which obtained, the power of America was so great in the country, that the party, who were believed to be American citizens, were allowed to pass out unmolested.

Both Urmia and Adana, as well as Joshua Gray, had seen the

look on the young men's faces, and noted their stern demeanour, and as a consequence the first few hours of their journey was in silence. After they had partaken of their midday meal, however, and noting the look in the eyes of the two girls, Victor could keep silence no longer. They had again mounted their horses, and rode side by side a little ahead of the others.

'Your name is Lincoln. You tell me you are related to the great President?' said Victor.

'That's so,' said John.

'There is one story about Abraham Lincoln that I remember above all others,' said Victor. 'It is said of him that, when he was a young man, he went one day into a slave-market in America. That slave-market revealed to Lincoln what slavery really meant. He saw children snatched from their mothers' arms, he saw wives sold away from their husbands, young girls sold away into shame; and when he came from the market, he caught the arm of a friend who had been with him and he said, "If ever I have a chance to hit at this thing, by the Eternal God, I'll hit hard!" The story's true, isn't it?'

'Yes,' said Lincoln, 'it's true. That was a great day for Abe Lincoln. I think sometimes it decided the fate of America.'

'We have seen worse things to-day than Lincoln ever saw,' said Victor, 'and from all we have been told, what we have seen is only a pocket edition of what is taking place all over this accursed country. Hundreds of thousands have been killed, and hundreds of thousands are suffering worse than death. And remember, they are not poor benighted niggers: they are an old and highly civilized race. They have kept the light of Christianity alive in this part of the world through the centuries. Have Lincoln's words no message to you?'

'Why, yes, they have,' said John.

'What are you going to do?'

'I am on my way to Erzerum now,' said John; 'I am going to say some straight things to the German and Turkish officials there.'

'And what good will you do? This thing was not born suddenly; it is not the wild impulse of the moment; it is a carefully thought-out plan. I know this: I was at Erzerum when Dr. Rohrback first expounded the scheme to Talaat Bey. I never

dreamed then that it would be anything like this. But you will do no good by appealing to either Turks or Germans.'

'What would you have me do?' asked John.

'Do?' and Victor's voice was almost scornful.

'Yes, do?' John had been silent for a moment, but now he spoke again.

'You are an American citizen, and you can get out of this country if you will. You have seen what Germans rule means in Turkey. The English, and French, and Russians are shedding their life-blood like water, to kill German devilry, and you Americans stand by and do nothing.'

'War is a ghastly thing,' said John, 'and this European quarrel is not the affair of the Americans.'

'Yes, war is a ghastly thing,' said Victor, 'but it is not as ghastly as what we have seen to-day. Not your quarrel! In God's name, whose quarrel is it, then? It is humanity's quarrel, it is the quarrel of civilization and the right to live, and your American Government stands supinely by while this hellish business goes on. What is the use of America pretending to be a leader among the nations, in humanity, and civilization, and Christianity, and keeping back while such things as we have seen to-day are done without protest? Why,' and Victor's voice was hoarse as he spoke, 'those two girls may be among the next victims.'

'I say, don't say that!' gasped John.

'If they are,' said Victor, his voice tense with passion, 'I shall not be alive to see it.'

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CONFERENCE OF YOUNG TURKS

IN due time they reached the outskirts of Erzerum. Their journey there, after leaving Gopal, had been on the whole uneventful. It is true they heard of other places not far from the route which they had travelled where the Armenians had been 'deported.' Those who gave them this information repeated glibly the old story that it was for the good of the Armenians, and for the safety of the Turkish Empire. They were told again and again that the Armenians had been traitors, and that the Government was very lenient in simply sending them away to a fertile part of the country. But no man was deceived. The determination grew stronger each day that the Armenians must be destroyed root and branch ; and meanwhile the Russian advance had been checked. The Turks became more confident again. Their armies had become reinforced, and they were making an obstinate stand against the onward march of the Russians.

As far as possible the young men kept these things from the two girls, who, as the days passed away and no harm happened to them, grew almost light-hearted and confident. Joshua Gray, who had a vein of dry humour and knew innumerable stories, beguiled them on their journey. Indeed, the old man felt quite fatherly towards them, and so cheerful was he that they did not seem to suspect what was taking place in the little villages close to which they had passed. Yusef and the other servants had been carefully instructed to say nothing of what they had seen and heard, and so presently, as they drew near Erzerum, both the girls seemed to think that they were going into a place of safety.

Victor, however, was very apprehensive of the future. Even

although nothing had happened to them of an evil nature since they left Bislek, he dreaded the future. If he could get them behind the Russian army, there was a chance of escape to England. He had studied the map carefully, and saw that by taking a long journey northward, towards Petrograd, they could travel by train through Norway, and by that means reach English soil. But that seemed impossible. For one thing, Urmia would not consent to leave Asia Minor without her mother, and for another, even if she would, there seemed no possibility of smuggling them through the Turkish lines.

Added to all this, a new feeling had been aroused in Victor's heart. He was madly jealous of John Lincoln. He could not hide from himself the fact that John Lincoln had fallen in love with the girl to save whom he was ready to lay down his life. It was a strange situation. Victor believed himself to be in honour bound not to give his heart to any one save the Cornish girl, whom he thought he had loved for years. He had made Ethel Tregenna believe he loved her, and while no definite promises had passed between them, he had done his best to win her affections. He felt sure, too, that this fair Cornish girl had given him her heart. He had left England with the full determination and hope of one day going back to wed her. And now all his hopes and desires in that direction had been scattered to the winds; now he knew he cared nothing for her.

On that terrible morning when he had watched the awful tragedy in Gopal, and remembered that Adana was an Armenian, and so in danger of suffering the same fate, he realized the truth. Adana was all the world to him, and Ethel was nothing.

And now it had been revealed to him that John Lincoln had cast eyes of love upon her. He saw how they delighted in each other's company, saw how Adana's eyes flashed when he approached her. To him, on the other hand, she seemed cold and indifferent. It might be that she had forgotten their first meeting, and all the perils they had passed through together. Indeed, to Victor's disordered imagination it seemed that not only had Adana forgotten him, but that Urmia found far more pleasure in the young American's society than in his own.

As a consequence, he became almost sullen and morose. Fears for the future haunted him, and he saw no way out of the laby-

rinth in which he found himself. Still, as he told himself again and again, he had not come to Turkey for pleasure or for happiness. It was for him to do the work he had set out to do, regardless of what might become of him.

From the distance Erzerum looked like a haven of rest. The white-roofed houses shone in the sunlight. The towers of Mohammedan mosques and Christian churches seemed to promise a kind of protection. Erzerum, at all events, was not a wild village. It was the centre of a great population, and there must be some semblance of civilization there.

'I guess we'll go to the American Mission first,' said John. 'There are women there, who will take charge of the ladies, and then we shall be free to work out our plans.'

'What appeals to me is the helplessness of it all,' said Victor.

'Come now,' said John, whose spirits had become almost exuberant, 'that won't do. I never felt so hopeful as I do now.'

'Hope? What is there to hope for?' asked Victor bitterly.

'Hosts of things,' replied John. 'I am going to give these Turkish johnnies and their German masters a good shaking up. I am going to tell them that they will have the United States against them if they persist in this devilish business. I am going to tell them what I have seen with my own eyes, and I shall threaten them that I shall proclaim it all over the United States if they don't desist. I tell you what, neither Turks nor Germans can afford to defy American public opinion.'

'You don't think so?' he went on presently, noting Victor's silence.

'What did the Germans care about American public opinion when they swept through Belgium?' replied Victor. 'Deeds as ghastly as those done here were committed. Hundreds of people, men, women, and children, were lined up in the streets and mown down by German guns. All the horrors which have been committed by the Turks among the Armenians were committed by the Germans among the Belgians. But because your President did nothing but write notes, the Germans laughed. They care nothing about American public opinion while the American Government does nothing.'

'We shall see,' said John confidently; 'you wait for a day or

two until I have had a chance of talking to them. As for the ladies, they must be kept safe at all hazards. We are both agreed on that, anyhow. And, thank Heaven, the American Mission is still a sanctuary.'

When they entered Erzerum, it appeared to Victor that something of importance had taken place. Flags were flying, and the people seemed much excited. He noted, too, that at the Governor's house a large concourse of people had assembled, as if in the expectation that some great pronouncement would be made.

Their reception by Dr. Burt, the head of the American Mission, was cordial in the extreme, and when he had heard Victor's story his sympathy knew no bounds. The name of Ibram Alexandropol was still remembered in Erzerum, and to all Christians the name was held in reverence.

His horror at what had taken place at Van, Bitlis, Gopal and other places I will not attempt to describe, for strange as it may appear to Europeans, the people at Erzerum had little knowledge of what was taking place in other parts of the country. So far Erzerum had largely escaped the general outrage, and news of it had been kept from the people. It was true that rumours had reached them that 'deportation' would take place at Erzerum, but they hoped for the best. Thus the story which the young men were able to tell shocked him beyond words.

'Yes, you must appeal to the tribunal of the Young Turks,' he said, but I have grave doubts—grave doubts. As for our friend here accompanying you when you appear before it, it is madness.'

'Madness or not,' said Victor, 'I want to do it. I do not think any one will suspect me of being anything but an American citizen, and it will explain my presence. Besides, I want to know exactly what takes place.'

In due time Dr. Burt made arrangements for their reception by the Council of Young Turks then sitting in the Government Buildings, and the two young men made their way through the crowded streets with fast-beating hearts.

The Government House in Erzerum is nearly in the centre of the city, a large, ill-kept, desolate-looking building. They were shown first of all into an open courtyard, and from thence into the ante-room where the public business of the city is conducted.

It was here that several members of the Young Turks' Government from Constantinople had come to confer with the Governors of the various provinces in Asia Minor. They had been in the city three days, during which time many things had been discussed of which the people in the town knew no details, although rumours were afloat which excited them greatly. Especially had this been the case when they had seen the chief Armenian priest leaving the building with a look of fear in his eyes.

When Victor had followed John Lincoln into the room, he could not help being fascinated by what he saw. When last he had been in Erzerum, he had been present at the gathering of the Armenian representatives of the Turkish Parliament. It was there that many of his later actions had been decided. It was because of what he had heard at that time that he had travelled north to the Caucasus, and had been admitted into the Russian army. Now all was different. In vain he looked among the Turks for one of his own people, but none were there. Evidently it was not thought wise that any Armenians should be present. Nevertheless, they were not all Turks who were gathered there that day. Four, if not five, of the number were Germans.

At the right hand of the President of the gathering sat a man of pronounced Teutonic origin. It was impossible to mistake him for anything else. Also two others were evidently from the same country, while, sitting in an obscure position, Victor saw Dr. Rohrbach, the originator of the deportation scheme which turned Asia Minor into a hell, and which meant the murder of between one and two million people.

Not far from the President, Victor saw not only the Governor of Erzerum, but old Talaat Bey and Djevdet Bey. The latter looked worn and anxious, as though he had been passing through a trying time.

As may be imagined, every nerve in the young man's body was in tension, but outwardly he showed no sign of it. He moved through the room, behind John Lincoln, almost with a kind of bravado. He announced, with every step he took, that he was an American citizen, and could therefore hold up his head in any assembly in the world. He gave a quick glance at the faces of Djevdet Bey and old Talaat, as well as at those of the Governor

of Erzerum and Dr. Rohrbach, to discover if there were any signs of recognition ; but there were none. Evidently he was taken for what he professed to be, even although he felt the ground to be trembling beneath his feet.

The President of the gathering, a man about forty-five years of age, and wearing all sorts of medals, spoke to John in Turkish. He told him that he had been informed that they came from the American Mission in Van, to make some representation before them, and as they had come from Constantinople to meet their confrères in Asia Minor concerning the good government of the country, they were prepared to receive them. He spoke of the troublous times in which they lived, when deeds which they were grieved to perform had to be done, so that law and order might obtain. He also told them that they had had full reports of all that had taken place in Van, and in the surrounding provinces, and hoped that they had not come to them with any hearsay but with actual statement of facts which could be proved. He also said that it gave him joy to see any members of the American Mission there, because it was the desire of Turkey to live on terms of peace with America, who had always been kindly to them, and had done so much for the well-being of their people in Turkey.

He spoke very glibly and plausibly, in low tones which he thought to be caressing, but which seemed to Victor like the hiss of a snake.

John Lincoln did not mince his words when stating his case. He did not believe, he said, that the Government of Constantinople could be aware of what had really taken place in the province of Van. He described the horrors, which made some of the old hardened Turks look apprehensively one at another.

'Even although one were to admit that the Armenians have been dangerous to the Turks and the Turkish Government,' said John, 'no civilized country wars upon women and children.'

'That is so,' said Emir Digma, 'all that has been done has been done for the welfare of the Armenians.'

'Then how can it be for the welfare of the Armenians to stab little babies in their cradles ?' asked John. 'How can it be for the welfare of the Armenians to outrage young girls in the public streets ? How can it be for the welfare of the Armenians to set fire to their houses and burn women and children in them ?

I know this has been done; I saw it with my own eyes.'

Upon this one of the Germans spoke. 'This is a mistake,' he said. 'I have lived in Van for two months, during all the time of which this gentleman has spoken, and while the abominable deeds of the Armenians aroused certain Turks to commit deplorable deeds, there was nothing like what we have heard from this gentleman. Evidently he has been carried away by credulity or by false information. Besides, I know that certain German officials who were there punished the Turks who, in a few cases, were guilty of wrong-doing.'

'Pardon me,' said John, 'but I am here to prove that the Turks who committed the worst deeds were rewarded for their devilry. And I am here to prove also that the German officials who are in Van incited them to commit them.'

'This is very sad,' said the President, and there was a tone of mockery in his voice; 'if such things as this have been done they shall be inquired into, and the offenders punished. But I cannot think you are right. The Governor of Van, Djevdet Bey, has given us a lengthy report of all that has taken place, and I am glad to know that the deportation has been conducted on the most humane lines. Of course, certain things have been done which are deplorable. What can we expect, when so many of the Armenians have been traitors, and when through their treason the city has been in danger? Doubtless many young men were carried away by just and righteous anger. But our treatment of the Armenians as a whole has been full of kindness. We have sent them to a fertile part of the country, where they can live together in peace and plenty. Of course it is very sad and it has grieved us very much to take the steps we have been obliged to take, but the Armenians have been a thorn in the side of the Turkish Government for many generations, and acting upon the advice of Dr. Rohrbach, who is known throughout the world for his kindness of heart and humanitarian views, we were led to adopt the deportation scheme until anger had subsided and our enemies crushed.'

After this speech it was evident both to John and Victor that, in spite of the plausible words of the Young Turks, they did no good to their cause by their interview. The President again and again insisted that Lincoln had been mistaken, and while

admitting that although certain regrettable incidents had taken place, they were acting on purely humanitarian lines in deporting the Armenians to Mesopotamia.

'Why,' he said, with a smile on his face which he intended to be benignant, 'Sultania, the place where the Armenians are deported, is a purely agricultural district, where crops grow almost without the planting, and where an industrious people can be in a kind of Gochen. As for Der-el-Zor, it is a perfect garden. Thus we are sending these people, who have acted as traitors, to an earthly paradise.'

The Council broke up for the day when John Lincoln's representation had finished, and the two young men were on the point of leaving, when an old Turk, who had sat near the President, came to John with a smile on his wicked, cruel face.

'Will you and your friend come with me for a minute?' he said. 'I have a room here at my disposal, and I would like to speak to you.'

'It doesn't seem much use,' replied John; 'evidently you have all made up your minds to carry out this business to the bitter end.'

'Do not say so,' said the Turk; 'when you are as old as I am, you will know that little can be done in public assemblies. It is in talking matters over quietly that things are done.'

He led the way into a room as he spoke, while John and Victor followed.

'My son has been to America,' he said, adopting a friendly attitude. 'Yours is a wonderful country, but you must remember that America's problems and ours are different. Besides we are at war—what would you?'

'And it seems to me that you are governed by your predominant partner,' said John significantly.

The old man shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

'What did your prophet of Nazareth say?' was his retort. '"Make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," eh? That is what we are doing. The hope of Turkey lies in Germany.'

'And unless you are careful,' said John, 'Germany will swallow you up.'

'We shall see,' and the old Turk shrugged his shoulders signi-

fificantly. ‘But, my young friend, whoever wins or whoever loses, we mean to gain in this war. As for the Armenians—bah! they are unclean dogs!’

‘You treat them worse than you treat your dogs.’

‘Dogs have teeth, but dogs are faithful,’ remarked the old Turk. ‘Besides, are we not kind? Are we not sending them out of the way of danger to a veritable Canaan? Was not Dr. Rohrbach’s scheme inspired by the milk of human kindness? Oh, my young friend, I know deplorable things have been done, so deplorable that I have not been able to sleep of a night thinking about them, but then, what would you? Besides, they are being sent to a place of safety.’

‘Hundreds of thousands of them will never come back,’ said John almost angrily.

The old Turk laughed. ‘Do you think we didn’t know that when we sent them?’ he said, showing his long yellow teeth. ‘Do you think the Germans didn’t know it, when they helped us to plan the scheme?’

‘Then you admit it is a wholesale butchery?’ said John.

Again the other laughed. ‘We are taking care of these lambs of yours,’ he said, ‘and when I get back to Constantinople I will tell those in authority there all you have said.’

‘It will not pay you to arouse America against you,’ and John’s voice became menacing.

‘America, eh? America loves dollars. America plays her own hand. Besides, what will America do? Tell me that, eh? And what *can* America do? Good evening. Allah is great. I am glad you see our side of the question.’

‘What did he mean by taking us into his room?’ asked John of Victor, when presently they found themselves in the street.

‘He looked at us both very closely, as though he were studying our faces.’

‘He did not speak to me,’ said Victor.

‘No, but I saw him watching you as a cat watches a mouse.’

They had covered but half the distance between the Government House and the American Mission, when Victor gripped John Lincoln by the arm. ‘This way,’ he whispered, ‘quickly—quickly!'

‘What’s the matter?’ asked John.

Victor did not speak until they were some distance down a narrow, evil-smelling street.

'Did you see that man?' he asked.

'What man?'

'Oh, I forgot; you do not know him! Well, I saw old Achma el Amad.'

'Great Scott!' said John, 'then you have to be careful.'

Victor's face had changed colour. While he had been in the presence of old Talaat Bey and the Governor of Erzerum he had shown no sign of perturbation. He looked around among the Young Turks from Constantinople, as well as among the chief men of Erzerum, some of whom he had met face to face, with a look of perfect calm. He had had no fear of recognition. But now a great terror gripped him. If Achma el Amad were in Erzerum, his danger had increased. Of course he might have come there only to report his failure to Djevdet Bey. On the other hand, he might have tracked them from Danana to Erzerum.

He reflected that ever since he had come to the East old Achma had been a bird of evil omen, and he had escaped his vigilance only by seeming miracle. It was true he did not think he had been recognized; Achma was looking another way when he had seen him. But he must be sure. He had not only himself to think of, but the two girls, whom in his heart of hearts he had sworn to save. Anyhow, he must know the truth; he must find out where Achma had taken up his abode, and learn the reason for his coming to Erzerum.

When they arrived at the Mission, even the peril which had sprung up so suddenly was forgotten.

'Have you heard the news?' asked Dr. Burt.

'News? What news?'

'The deportation scheme is to be carried out in Erzerum. All the Armenians have been given five days' notice to get ready.'

CHAPTER XXV

A CONFERENCE OF THREE

'ERZERUM will be hell in less than a week.'

It was John Lincoln who spoke. He was greatly excited, and his confidence in the power of the American flag had largely disappeared.

'It seems like a ghastly dream,' said the doctor weakly.

'It's no dream to us,' replied John. 'It's about the ghastliest bit of reality I've struck during my short pilgrimage on this planet.'

'You see,' went on the doctor, 'there are many thousands of Armenians here at Erzerum. They own a vast amount of property, they have many churches, and I fear they will resist.'

'Sure,' replied John. 'They will resist. The question is, what are *we* to do?'

'I am a man of peace,' said the doctor. 'I am almost glad they have been disarmed, that they will not be able to commit bloodshed.'

Both young men were silent.

'Oh, I hope—I hope they will submit quietly,' he went on. 'Don't you?' and he turned to Victor.

'What would you do in their place?' asked Victor hotly. 'Look here, Dr. Burt, suppose you were an Armenian, suppose you were born here, that you had daughters here who were in danger of being treated like Armenian women have been treated all over the country, what would you do? Would you let these beasts work their will, without endeavouring to protect your own flesh and blood?'

'But it will mean death if they do try to protect themselves.'

'Better death than—that!' and Victor's voice was hoarse with passion.

The old man was silent for some seconds. Then he went on, trying to speak hopefully. 'It may be better here than at Gopal. There the people had practically no notice given to them; here they have several days. Perhaps, as there is an immense population here, the Turks may be restrained.'

Victor left the room. He felt he could not quietly discuss the matter. He wanted to be alone to think. He remembered that Achma el Amad was in Erzerum, and the possibilities were that this old fox knew all that had happened. Perhaps even now he had discovered the hiding-place of Adana and Urmia. He would have at his disposal all the means which the country offered for tracking them down. Whatever telegraph service there was would be in his possession. He must find out, but how?

He was just entering the room which had been allotted to him in the Mission when he saw Adana and Urmia together.

'Oh, Victor,' said the latter, 'have you heard the news?'

'Lots,' he said, trying to speak lightly. 'What news do you mean?'

'The news that all our people in Erzerum are to be sent to Mesopotamia.'

'I have heard there is a talk about it,' he said, 'but don't worry. The American flag flies over this Mission, and so all the inmates are safe. Besides, you are thought to be Americans.'

'But if the truth should come to light!' gasped the girl.

'Never fear,' he laughed; 'we've got out of some ugly corners before, and we shall again.'

Urmia had come close to him and caught his arm, but Adana did not speak a word. Victor wondered what she was thinking about. He could not fathom the look in her large, dark eyes or understand her demeanour. Perhaps she was thinking of John Lincoln, and wondering how he would be able to defend her.

'Hallo, I say, there you are!' and John Lincoln came up. 'You've heard about this business, then. But you girls mustn't trouble one bit,' and there was cheery optimism in his voice, although he had been anything but optimistic in Dr. Burt's presence. 'You can sleep quietly,' he went on, 'nothing's going to happen to you. The Stars and Stripes float over these

buildings, and of course you are American women, so therefore you are safe.'

'Do you think so, really think so, Mr. Lincoln?' and Urmia's voice trembled with eagerness. 'It is good to hear you say so,' she added.

'If a hair of your head is harmed,' said John, looking at Adana rather than at her, 'this blessed Turkish Empire shall be smashed into smithereens.'

Still Adana did not speak, but she looked from one face to another as if trying to understand.

'Have you any plans, Mr. Lincoln?' she said at length.

'A score,' replied John. 'Not that they have taken definite shape yet; but don't fear, Miss Adana.'

'And you?' she asked, turning to Victor, and there was a new tone in her voice.

'One must *know* before one can act,' was his reply.

'It seems to me that we know enough,' and there was bitterness in her voice.

'No,' replied Victor, 'one can never know enough. But I mean to know more before to-morrow morning.'

The light of resolution had already come into his eyes. It might seem as though, while they had been talking, plans had formed themselves in his mind. Soon after dark he found himself in the streets alone. He knew his danger if he were discovered, but he did not seem to heed it.

Every thoroughfare was now full of people, and the excitement which had been suppressed when he had entered the city two days before now expressed itself. On every hand people were talking about the order which had gone forth, and which would mean the exodus of thousands of Armenians from the city. Many of the Turks were jubilant at the thought of what it would mean, while some were angry at what they heard.

'They have to leave everything behind,' he heard one man say, 'that will mean that some of us will have a finger in the pie.'

'No,' replied another, 'it is promised by the Government that all their goods shall be stored until they are brought back again.'

At this there was a loud laugh of incredulity.

'How much of it will be left by the time they return?' shouted many in chorus.

'Ah! but meanwhile their houses, their shops, their farms, are to be occupied by the refugees which were driven out of the Balkan States during the war.'

'That's a shame! Why should the Europeans benefit, while we have nothing?'

'We'll take care we *do* have something,' cried others. 'Besides, there are to be great doings, and a little bloodshed is arranged for, so as to frighten those who may be obstinate. Some of the pretty women are going to be converted; there is one I mean to have for myself.'

Snatches of conversation like this Victor heard as he threaded his way through the dark streets. No one molested him, and although many gave him a second glance, his appearance caused no remark. Members of the American Mission were known and respected in Erzerum.

He sat down in front of a café of the better order, where some men were playing cards. Calling for a glass of a kind of sherbet, which was a common drink among the Turks, he proceeded to watch the game. The men gave him a suspicious glance, but paid no particular heed to him, especially as they saw him take up a Turkish newspaper and was apparently deeply immersed in its contents. Between the hands of cards that were played the Turks gossiped. For some minutes nothing was said of great interest to Victor, but at length a word caught his attention. It was the name of Djevdet Bey.

'Some say his governorship is to be taken from him,' said one of the men.

'Why?'

'It is said that through him we got driven back from the Caucasus in the New Year. He has been careless about his speech, too, and spies learnt his plans. I heard that Emir Digma threatened him with all sorts of things, and that our Governor's brother is to take his place.'

'That is not so,' replied another, 'if it were, he would not be at the Governor's house to-night.'

'Is he there?'

'Yes; I saw him going there with him. There was a man from Aleppo with them—a sly-looking old fox.'

'Pff!' said another, 'it is hot. If I had a garden like the Governor, I should sit out in it to-night.'

The hand was dealt, and the men became too absorbed in the game for further conversation. Victor quickly drank his sherbet, and made his way towards the outskirts of the town.

It was a wonderful night of stars, but no moon shone. The sky between the stars looked almost black. As Victor drew nearer the Governor's house the silence became almost oppressive. He knew where the palace was situated: he had been to it more than once when he had played the part of Suliman several months before, and he knew the habits of the Governor. There was a walled garden around the house, but he remembered a breach in the wall, through which an active man could enter.

He walked very slowly and stealthily, listening eagerly all the time. Presently he stopped. He had caught the sound of murmuring voices. The night was very hot, not a breath of wind stirred the foliage, and the Governor was in the garden as he expected. For some seconds he listened, but not a word could he hear. All the same, the murmur of voices was plain.

A minute later he had found his way through the breach in the wall and was creeping beneath the foliage towards the spot where he had located the sound. Chance had favoured him. The night was hot, and as the men at the café had said, the Governor of Erzerum had decided to smoke his cigarettes and drink his sherbet in the open air rather than in the house. The myriads of stars made darkness impossible; nevertheless the almost tropical foliage enabled him to remain in obscurity. He hated playing the eavesdropper, but he felt that the life, and more than the life, of the woman he loved was at stake. Of his own safety he thought but little; it was Adana of whom he was thinking.

'I tell you, Achma, I will not have it,' and he knew it was Djevdet Bey who spoke. 'You know what our men are when their blood is up, and if they were rounded up with the rest of the Armenians, they will be—— Tah! I tell you, I will not have it. Are you sure they are there?'

'I am sure they are in Erzerum. My task was difficult, but so far I have succeeded.'

'Difficult!' and Djevdet Bey spoke angrily. 'You had them in the palms of your hands at Sassoun ; you allowed them to outwit you there as well as at Danana.'

'And I have told my lord how they did outwit me,' replied Achma. 'One of those women is as cunning as the evil one—which of them I do not know, but I have my suspicions.'

'I know,' replied Djevdet ; 'she has the brains of a man, and the resolution of a man, too. All the same, you are a fool. Still,' he went on, as if fearing he had said too much, 'you were clever in tracing them here.'

'Had they been Turkish women,' said Achma, 'all would have been as easy as children's games, but these accursed Christians teach their women to think, and act. Still, we have them now. I have had them traced to Erzerum.'

'Are you sure they are at the American Mission ?'

'No, I am not sure. But the order has now gone forth that all Armenians are to be deported without delay. I will see to it that they are brought to you.'

'How can they be, if they have the protection of the American Mission ?'

Achma laughed scornfully. 'What is the American Mission to us at a time like this ? If they harbour traitors, they take the consequences. If they befriend the Armenians, they must suffer—Allah is great !'

'No, no, I cannot allow it,' and this time the Governor of Erzerum spoke. 'We have strict orders to respect the Americans.'

'Our masters the Germans, I suppose ?' and Djevdet Bey spoke with a sneer.

'Germans or no Germans,' said the Governor, 'we have orders that the American Mission must be respected.'

'Has your lordship considered,' said Achma, 'if the women are there, Alexandropol is there ? Shall the Stars and Stripes protect a viper ? Remember how he has deceived us ; remember the information he carried to the Russian lines !'

'But you are not sure he is there.'

'I shall know to-morrow,' said Achma. 'Neither of them can leave Erzerum, I have seen to that.'

'He must be taken at all hazards,' and Djevdet Bey spoke

with a snarl. 'He has outwitted you many times, Achma; see he does not outwit you again.'

Achma laughed. 'I have him in the hollow of my hand,' he said; 'whatever he does, he cannot escape. If pity could come into my heart I should pity him, for no lost soul in the pit of flame shall suffer as he shall suffer.'

'But not before he has told us all we want to know,' and the Governor spoke eagerly.

'It will be in getting him to tell all he knows that he will suffer,' laughed Achma. 'I have measured him, I have weighed him in the balances. He will first of all be secret, and refuse to speak. But what are hot irons for? And the eyes are very tender when the fire is near them. And what are limbs given to infidels for but to be torn off? Why have they nerves except to suffer agony? I tell you, I have planned everything.'

'But what of the women?' cried Djevdet Bey. 'Remember, I will not have them suffer. They are as fair as the virgins in Paradise, whom our Lord Mohammed promised us. I should never sleep again if harm happened to them.'

'The women shall be placed in your power,' said Achma.

'Yes, but not brutally,' said Djevdet Bey; 'unclean hands must not be placed upon them.'

'Love hath indeed entered your heart, when you can think so tenderly of them after they have deceived you repeatedly,' said the Governor of Erzerum.

'I have a plan in my mind whereby they shall be led to come to you like homing doves,' said Achma. 'I knew what you felt about them, and I have made my preparations.'

'What are they? Tell me.'

'Need my lord know?' asked Achma.

'Yes,' replied Djevdet Bey, 'they have angered you so that your cruelty knows no bounds, and I will not have a hair of their heads injured.'

Achma laughed quietly. Evidently he was amused at Djevdet Bey's love for these two Armenian girls.

'Care you what happens to the widow Erzinghan?' he inquired.

'Care! I would have her treated as many another Armenian woman has been treated. She has flouted me for years. But

for the American Mission in Van, where she sought protection, she should long ago have become even as other women have.'

'But her daughter loves her,' cried Achma, 'and the fair Adana looks on her as a mother. To save her, those two maidens would do anything.'

'Well, and what of that?' *...*

'The widow Erzinghan is even now on her way to Erzerum,' and Achma laughed quietly.

'You have brought her here by force?'

'No, my lord, but she is coming here because it has been proved to her that the maidens have need of her.'

'Achma, you are very wise. Forgive my words of anger.'

'My old head thinks of many things when I cannot sleep at night,' laughed Achma. 'In five days the deportation will commence. Possibly there will be what the Europeans call heartrending scenes; doubtless many of them will resist. The disarmament has not been carried out with sufficient rigour in Erzerum, so possibly a few of the faithful will be killed, then our excuse for a little shedding of blood will come. Supposing the widow Erzinghan is found to be guilty of disobedience, suppose death stares her in the face—what will the maidens do? Will they not agonize for their mother's sake? Then cannot my lord obtain sufficient power to save her—on conditions?' and Achma laughed again. 'By that means he will soften the hearts of the maidens and, as I said, they will come to him like homing doves.'

'It is a good scheme,' said the Governor, 'but if they will not? If the woman continues to defy us, and if the maidens prefer death to Djevdet Bey's embraces, what then?'

'Then,' and Achma laughed again, 'I do not think my lord will grieve if they are treated even as other Armenian women have been treated. But you need not fear. They will become as clay in the hands of a potter when they see the widow suffering. Will my lord bestow upon me another of his delectable cigarettes? I would like another glass of sherbet, too; the night is very hot.'

For some seconds there was a silence, then Djevdet Bey spoke again. 'This must be done quickly,' he said. 'I hear that the

Russian armies are gathering in great strength. Report has it that they are marching towards Trebizond and that our men are yielding before them. But tell me exactly what you mean to do, Achma.'

' My lord's thoughts are deep,' was Achma's reply ; ' he knows already what is in my mind. Explanation is not necessary. Hath not my lord given me much power ? Have not clever spies been told to do my bidding ? Before to-morrow night at this time I shall know not only where Alexandropol is, but where the maidens are. And wherever they are, it does not matter. Then shall my lord see what a faithful servant can do.'

For several minutes they conversed in whispers, and presently Victor heard Djevdet Bey say, ' If this comes to pass, you may ask what you will, Achma, and it shall be given to you. But it is late now, and I must return. I have much to say to old Talaat before I seek sleep.'

Five minutes later Victor was wending his way back to the American Mission, his eyes ablaze and his brain whirling.

CHAPTER XXVI

LOVE SEEKETH NOT HER OWN

MIDNIGHT was far past, but the three men who had been together for more than an hour still remained talking. Their faces were stern and set ; despair was in their eyes, but there was no suggestion of resignation. Even Dr. Burt, a quiet, peaceable old man, had not given a hint that he would yield one iota to the Turks' claims, whatever they might be.

They had listened to Victor's recital of his experiences with increasing wonder and dismay, and when he had finished they looked one at the other as if to ask whether any one had anything to suggest. For more than an hour they had talked, but plan after plan had died at its birth. Whichever way they looked the prospect seemed hopeless, and not one ray of light pierced the gloom. Each man was helpless, and one was in dire danger. Even John Lincoln ceased to be optimistic, and he no longer boasted about the power of the American flag. He realized, as he had never realized before, that they were in a country that had barely emerged from the swaddling-clothes of barbarism. No effective appeal could be made. The Turks, inspired by German greed and cruelty, had at last found a way whereby they could exterminate the Armenian Christians. The plan of Dr. Rohrbach appeared before them in all its ghastly nakedness. Hundred thousand after hundred thousand had already been massacred, or sent to a lingering death. Nothing had been held sacred. Old men and women had been destroyed as if they were so many flies ; little children had not escaped the knives of the murderers ; while young girls by thousands had suffered a fate worse than death. According to the Mohammedan religion, as it applied to the heretics, there seemed no room for mercy.

Asia Minor was a shambles, and the blood which had been spilt had made their appetites keen for more.

The great Powers of Europe, had they interfered before, might have saved them, but they had held their hands, and now they were powerless. Germany, its hands steeped in blood, had ruthlessly encouraged the massacre which went on day by day, and now Erzerum, one of the most important towns in Asia Minor, was to witness scenes at which even Nero might have shuddered.

And they were powerless.

The Armenians were but a tenth of the population of the country even before the massacres, and they were wholly at the mercy of their masters, and mercy did not exist.

'Mind you,' said Dr. Burt, 'I will not give up hope. After all, the Germans are at the back of this business, and they will not like news of it to reach America. The Stars and Stripes do stand for something, thank God!'

But John Lincoln did not echo him, while Victor shrugged his shoulders.

'I don't think we need reckon on that,' he said. 'The American Government has known what has been done for the last two or three months, but it has done nothing. America can do nothing unless she goes to war, and declares herself on the side of the Allies. And that she will not do. She is too busy about other things. The other great Powers, who years ago might have done something, can do nothing now. Europe is at war, and my race may be exterminated before the Allies conquer. This ghastly holocaust will go on; but Adana and Urmia must be saved.'

'Great heavens! yes,' gasped John Lincoln.

'I have told you what Achma's plans are, and of Djevdet Bey's acceptance of them. Can we stand by and see that done?'

John Lincoln's face was drawn with agony, but he did not speak.

'Not even to save their mother's life do I believe they would become the playthings of Djevdet Bey,' went on Victor; 'it would be worse than death to them.'

'Yes, but if they refuse?'

'There is a God in heaven,' said old Dr. Burt.

'It is difficult to believe it,' said Victor; 'at any rate, it seems as though He has hidden His face from this country. The devil reigns here.'

'The devil and the Germans,' said John Lincoln.

'They are identical,' and Victor's voice was hard.

'Have you any plan?' queried Lincoln presently, noting the wild light in the young fellow's eyes.

'I see a means whereby one of them might be saved,' replied Victor, and he seemed like a man signing his own death-warrant as he spoke.

'Yes,' cried John eagerly, 'what is it?'

But Victor did not speak for a few seconds, then he said hoarsely, 'Lincoln, you love one of these girls, don't you?'

'As my own life,' said John.

'In this, as in almost every country,' went on the young fellow, and his voice was altogether toneless, 'a wife takes the husband's nationality.' He stopped here, as if unable to say more.

Lincoln gave a gasp. 'I had not thought of that,' he said.

'I do not say it would succeed, but it is a chance. This is no time for ordinary measures.'

'But you—you?' gasped John, like a man bereft of his senses.

'I do not count,' said Victor. 'I am an Armenian; I can protect no one; I cannot protect myself. But marriages take place in this Mission, and if—if—' He ceased speaking again, and his face was like the face of a dead man, for he knew what his suggestion meant. He felt sure that John Lincoln loved Adana Ulah, and he believed that she returned his love. For days he had been madly jealous of him; that perhaps was why he had never spoken to the young American about it.

'But even then, there is—there is the other,' stammered Lincoln.

'To save one will be something,' and still Victor spoke in the same toneless voice; 'to know that she was rescued from this hell would—would—' his head fell on his chest for a moment, then he took a quick turn across the room, as if trying to nerve himself for a terrible ordeal.

'You are an American, therefore you belong to a neutral country. You can claim your right to leave the country, while

she, as your wife, could go with you. She might go unharmed.

He saw that Lincoln's eyes were shining with a new light, that what he had said appealed not only to his reason but to his heart.

'She—she might not accept,' he stammered presently. 'She might say that she will remain and suffer with her friend. They seem like sisters, more than sisters. Besides, there is the lady Erzinghan to consider.'

'We can only do what we can,' said Victor, 'and this seems within the realms of possibility. What do you say, doctor?'

'I hardly know what to say,' replied the old divine; 'I never dreamt of such a thing. Would you do it, John?'

'Do it!' cried John. 'I would give my life to do it! Why—why—but I cannot believe she'd consent. I have never dared to speak of love to her.'

'Then the time has come to speak,' said Victor, and his voice might have belonged to another man, so hoarse and unnatural was it. 'Go to her at the first opportunity and tell her that you love her. If she accepts you, you may possibly save her.'

'Yes,' replied Lincoln, 'but marriage is a sacred thing. I love her too much to ask her to sell herself to me even for safety, if—if she does not love me. Better—better anything than that she should be my wife just to save her own life. It would be sacrilege, blasphemy. If she loves me, I should be in heaven at the thought of it, but if she does not, why—why—don't you see? All my life I should be haunted with the thought that I had taken a loveless wife to my heart.'

'Even that is better than the fate which Djevdet Bey has planned for her. Go, man; go now!'

'They will have gone to bed,' said John Lincoln.

'No, they have not,' said Dr. Burt. 'They are in the room overhead; I hear their footsteps now.'

'Go, man; go at once!' persisted Victor, still speaking in the same unnatural voice, and with his eyes burning with a strange light.

John looked from one to the other, and then hurried out of the room.

'Which of the two is it, do you know?' asked Dr. Burt.

'Yes, I know.'

'But if she won't consent ?'

'She will.'

'But if she won't, have you anything further in your mind ?'

'Doctor,' said Victor, 'you have been in Erzerum a good many years ; have you ever converted a Turk ?'

'Yes, a few. But it is terribly difficult. You see, they dare not forswear their faith. All my converts have been secret ones ; they have left the country and have gone to America, so as to be true to their new-found faith and save their lives.'

'Are there no secret ones in Erzerum ?' asked Victor.

'Yes,' said the old man after a few seconds' thought, 'there is one man and his wife. They are influential people, too. But they have not yet dared to profess conversion ; they are still looked upon as faithful Mohammedans. Still, they are Christians at heart.'

'Do you know them well ?'

'Yes, very well. You see—'

'Where do they live ?'

'At an old house near the northern fortifications of the city, in a little street called the Road of Islam.'

'They are old people, did you say ?'

'No, not old, say from fifty-five to sixty. Years ago he was a manufacturer of carpets, but he has retired now.'

'What kind of people are they ?'

'The man is not like the ordinary Turk : he is quiet, retiring thoughtful. He says but little. All the same, he is very influential. He is rich, and is quite an authority on commerce ; when he speaks, his word goes a long way. But he does not speak often. He is looked upon as somewhat secretive. He never goes to cafés, and since he retired from business is seldom seen in public.'

'And the woman, his wife ? I suppose he has only one wife ?'

'He has only one wife. She is a woman bowed down with grief.'

'In what way ?'

'Three years ago there was a smallpox epidemic here in Erzerum, and their two children, a young man and young woman, were both victims. It nearly broke her heart. It was through their illness that I got to know them. For months she would

speak to no one, and even now she seldom goes out of doors.'

'Is she kind, faithful ?'

'I hardly know as to that. You see, Turkish women have been so oppressed through the centuries, being regarded as mere tools rather than as human beings, that they have but little individuality. Therefore one does not know what she would do under critical circumstances. I think but for her Ismayl would have publicly braved the anger of his people and professed his conversion to the Christian faith.'

'You think she is not to be trusted, then ?'

'I do not say that. Yet, she must be. She knows her husband's views, but she has never breathed a word to any one.'

'She is not a talkative woman, then ?'

'No, anything but that. Why are you asking all these questions ?'

Victor did not reply, but continued walking up and down in the room.

'What is in your mind, Alexandropol ?' and Dr. Burt looked at him keenly.

'They are not safe here. Old Achma will have this place searched from floor to ceiling. He will find out all about the inmates ; he will learn everything.'

'He dare not,' said Dr. Burt ; 'the Turkish authorities have promised us—'

'He cares nothing about authorities !' interrupted Victor. 'Besides, his mind is like a corkscrew, and he has a hundred schemes on foot. Even now he is at work. He may be here any time, and don't you see if he tells these Turkish authorities that you have Armenian women staying here, you'll place yourself in the wrong. You'll be arraigned for harbouring the country's enemies and for keeping the officials from doing their duty. Dr. Burt, is there a way whereby we can get to this man Ismayl's house without being watched ?

'I—I think so, but—but what is in your mind ?'

'Could you get to speak to them without attracting outside attention ?'

'Yes, I could do that. I have visited them several times, and always in secret.'

'Are they kindly disposed towards Armenians ?'

'They are kindly disposed to all Christians.'

'Let us go, then; there is no time to be wasted.'

'Go where?'

'To the house of this man Ismayl. We are bound to run risks. We will ask them to give Urmia a hiding-place until this—this business is over.'

Dr. Burt looked startled. As I have said, he was a timid old man, and would never on his own initiative take great risks. But the intensity of Victor's passion carried him away.

'I tell you, it seems the only chance,' went on Victor; 'they are not safe here. To-night, to-morrow, any time, the Turkish hounds may pounce upon them, and then—oh, let's be going!'

'But had we not better wait till John Lincoln comes back? We shall know whether the young lady has consented.'

'She will consent,' and Victor's voice became hoarse again. 'You must wed them this very night. You have the authority of the Turkish Government to perform marriages according to Christian rites. Yes, they must be married before sunrise to-morrow morning—then—then she may be saved.'

'But, my dear young man, things cannot be done like that, even here in Turkey! There must be time to make arrangements.'

'Time!' cried Victor, 'when hell is let loose! We must act, man, act! Those girls must be saved!'

'Yes, yes, but you don't understand. There are formalities to be complied with and a score of things to attend to. Besides, John must be consulted first. Evidently he is in love with this girl and is willing to marry her, therefore he should have a voice to say in the matter.'

At that moment John Lincoln came into the room.

Victor gave him a quick, searching glance; then he felt as though a cold hand had gripped his heart. The look in John Lincoln's eyes was not of despair, but of great hope, of a mighty joy.

For some seconds there was a tense silence. It seemed as though each was waiting for the other to speak.

'Well, John, has she consented?'

'No,' said John, 'that is—no.'

Victor started to his feet. A new light was in his eyes.

' You mean she has refused you ? '

' I do not say that ; but it is not fair to her. I do not think she had ever dreamed of it. You couldn't expect a girl to make up her mind in a second.'

' But it may save her life, her honour, man ! '

' I do not think she had thought of that. Anyhow, I couldn't persuade her ; she was afraid.'

' Afraid. *She afraid !*' and there was incredulity in Victor's voice.

' Yes, afraid. She—she—why, she has really known me only a short time, and—and if the lady Erzinghan is coming here—don't you see ?—she wanted to ask her about it. You know what young girls are. Besides, it is right.'

' But she didn't refuse you outright ? ' queried Victor.

' No.'

' And she cares for you—loves you ? '

' Thank God, I believe she does,' said John. ' I say, what can we do ? If what you say is true, that old devil Achma el Amad may have his minions here any time, and then—oh, for God's sake, let's do something ! '

Victor stood staring into vacancy for some seconds, then he said hoarsely, ' Come, let us go to this old man, Ismayl.'

CHAPTER XXVII

ACHMA'S VICTORY

ONE morning, as the voices of the Mueddins waisted out over the city calling the people to prayer, a dirty-looking Turk with a tousled head of hair made his way towards the great mosque of Eed-al-Kurban. This was the most important place of prayer in the city. It was here old Talaat Bey came each day. Here, too, members of the Young Turks' Government had come shortly after they had entered Erzerum. It was the most renowned Beit Allah in Asia Minor. Even the great mosque at Trebizond could not claim the sanctity of the Eed-al-Kurban. Many of the faithful in Erzerum, indeed, declared that not even in Mecca was there a more sacred place than beneath the great dome in Erzerum.

The man in question was not easy to describe. He might have been a beggar ; he might, on the other hand, have been some holy dervish who came into Erzerum from the mountains. His dark face was largely hidden by his head-gear, while his muscular form was enveloped in long, loose robes. In his eyes shone the light of a fanatic, while his lips constantly moved as if in prayer.

People from all parts of the city were finding their way into the mosque. Some of them were men of importance. The man found his way in with the rest, and boldly walked towards the Mehrab, the holy place in the mosque. He was about to spread his carpet, as if for the purpose of prayer, when a man, who was evidently the Sheikh ul Islam of Erzerum, found his way to a kind of platform close to the Mehrab, whereon a table had been placed. On this table was a copy of the Koran.

The Sheikh opened the book and read aloud, while the crowds who were gathered within the mosque listened attentively. The man also listened with the rest, indeed he paid marked attention to every word that fell from the Sheikh's lips. He seemed to

gloat over the promises which the Koran made to the faithful of a blessed Paradise, and the threats of eternal doom which would be the lot of all who did not bask in the sunlight of the Prophet's smile. Earnest listener as he was to the words of the Koran, however, he gave quick glances around the crowd, and presently, as his eyes fell upon a man near him, he seemed specially interested. Any who watched him would have said that he was a man who prayed not only at the allotted time but at many others.

Achma el Amad was also at the great mosque that day. It was he whom the stranger noted. Presently, when the reading of the Koran was over, the two spread their carpets and knelt almost side by side near the holy place. Achma also, although noted as a very devout man, had cast quick glances around the mosque while the Koran was being read, but during prayer had placed his forehead on the stone floor, and knelt for a long time motionless.

As they were leaving the mosque, Achma noted the man who had been kneeling by him and gave him a searching glance, but showed no signs of recognition. There were many sects in Erzerum, which is perhaps the most cosmopolitan city in Asia Minor. Outside the mosque the stranger was joined by another man, who appeared to have come from a distance. Only a few hasty words passed between them, after which they separated and both were lost in the crowd.

Meanwhile the excitement of Erzerum grew as the time when the Armenians were to be deported, and sent to the new Goshen, drew near. For months little had happened to excite the populace as a whole. After the great reverse which the Turks had suffered in the first days of the New Year, the stand which they had been able to make kept the Russians back, and if the invading hosts of the north took some of the Turkish positions in one place, the Turks boasted that they had taken better positions in others.

Soldiers were constantly coming in and going out of the town, but no decisive news was heard. Of one thing they were assured: Erzerum was safe. The authorities had to admit that if once the great forts of the eastern side of the city were to fall before the Russian army, the city would be in dire

peril, but that, the people were sure, could never happen. Between them and the Russians was a long line of brave Turkish soldiers, who would again drive the Russians far to the north, and so do for the faithful all that had been promised at the beginning of the war. Thus, although many were disappointed and angry at their first failure, they looked everywhere with confidence to the future. The Germans, they were told, were sweeping over the plains of Poland, and the Russian army in the Caucasus was being depleted to reinforce the enemy farther north. All they had to do was to have patience, and victory would be theirs. Thus they had settled down to a kind of fatalism ; they had to suffer, but Allah would fight for them.

Now, however, all was excitement. Thousands of the enemy of the Faith who lived in Erzerum were to be driven out, and many of the Turks gloated over the thought of entering into the possessions of the rich Armenians. Neither man, woman, nor child, they were told, was to escape. Every Armenian was to be dragged from his home and sent away. All who resisted must die. This was necessary for the well-being of the faithful and of the Fatherland.

Not only was the city often full of Turkish soldiers, but the number of Germans grew day by day. It might seem as though some great battle were imminent, and German officers were constantly in evidence, drilling and giving command to the Turkish army. Northward, a few miles from the city, thousands of men were engaged digging trenches, while the roads were full of horses and mules dragging up great guns and ammunition.

But as I have said, this had become a kind of commonplace, and the people were not greatly excited by it. But the deportation of the Armenians was to be an event which out-classed every other.

At length the day arrived when, as the fanatical Moslems said to each other, Erzerum was to be freed from the plague of Armenians. Ever since the order had been issued, Sheikhs and Mueddins had been proclaiming throughout the city that the reason why the Turks had not been completely triumphant was that they had allowed a cursed thing to remain in the camp. The stories which Mohammed, in writing the Koran, had taken from the Bible were proclaimed with great vehemence.

'My children,' said one old Sheikh, 'were not the men of Israel driven back from Ai, and were they not slaughtered with a great slaughter because there was an accursed thing in the camp? That accursed thing in Turkey is the Armenian Christians. Was not a king of the Jews punished because he had a false mercy? Was he not commanded to kill men, women, and children of an accursed race? And because he spared some of them, did not the wrath of Allah fall upon him? This, too, has been our sin. The command of Allah has been that we must not spare men, women, or children of the accursed Armenians, and we, because we have been merciful, have spared some of them, and Allah has been angry with us. Now the time has come for us to turn away His wrath. We still desire to be merciful, but the breath of the faithful must no longer be poisoned by breathing the same air as the infidel. Already many parts of the country have been purified of their presence. They have been sent to a region where they can live amongst their own people. Here in Erzerum many thousands have grown fat by feeding on the bread of the faithful. That time has come to an end. Allah's wrath will be appeased when we obey his commands.'

Never had Erzerum, in all its long and varied history, seen such a day as that on which the Armenians had been driven forth from their homes. Men, women, and children were dragged from their hiding-places, and none were spared. Rank and fortune made no difference. Ecclesiastics, merchants, lawyers, doctors, suffered the same doom as those of low degree. Erzerum was a city of wailing and anguish. The streets were full of blood, for many had resisted, and resistance gave the excuse to their enemies for deeds of violence. Wholesale robbery was carried on, outrage was the order of the day.

Through it all, however, the Turkish officials kept up the farce that they were doing everything out of kindness to the Armenians. They were sending them away, they said, to save them from the righteous wrath of the faithful, and to give them security and peace. Moreover, any whom they might select as suitable cases for conversion were to be spared, if they vowed allegiance to the Mohammedan faith. These, in nearly every case, were young girls from sixteen to twenty-five years of age, and who were fair to look upon.

It was perhaps one of the saddest sights that the world has ever seen when thousands of these poor creatures, whose only sin was that they belonged to a prosperous race and were Christians, were dragged into a great open space, before deportation. The streets were full of soldiers, who carried out their brutal work evidently with savage joy, these soldiers, in many cases, being commanded by German officers.

None of them were allowed to take scrip or purse. They were told that they would be provided with everything that was necessary in a new home.

For once the Turkish women were allowed to mingle with the crowd. But in nearly every case they wore the regulation veil. How many victims there were, it would be difficult to say, neither would it be possible to describe their misery. Mothers, with babies scarcely a week old, dragged themselves painfully along the ill-paved streets. Old men, scarcely able to walk, were driven along at the point of the Turks' bayonets ; sick people, who, by every law of humanity, ought to have been in bed, were cursed and maltreated by brutal soldiery. Those who resisted were murdered, and many were worse than murdered ; and those who reached their journey's end would die a lingering death.

This was the Germans' idea of deportation ; this was the fruits of Kultur. It was Gopal over again, only multiplied many times over.

Old Achma el Amad was there, looking at everything with evil eyes. He had been busy ever since his arrival at Erzerum, and a report had gone forth throughout the city that one Victor Alexandropol, the son of one of Turkey's greatest enemies, had been discovered and brought with the rest. It was said of him that, by lying and fraud, he had stolen the secrets of the faithful and had sold them to the Russian army ; that this was the reason why the Turks had been driven back early in the New Year, and thousands of the faithful killed. People determined that whatever happened to others, he should suffer the ghastliest tortures.

I will not attempt to describe in detail the horrors of that day, or tell how young girls were forced to profess abandonment of Christianity and allegiance to Mohammed. The angels in heaven must have been weeping for very sorrow.

The victims were kept in the open space for many hours, for what purpose no one seemed to know. But old Achma was seen going from one part of the crowd to another, eagerly examining the faces of the women. At length his eyes rested upon one who was dressed like a Turkish woman and who was carefully veiled. According to the laws of the Mohammedans no man may lift a Turkish woman's veil in an open place. But no sooner had Achma's eyes rested upon this woman than he followed her from place to place. It was evident that his presence there was a part of a plan which he had carefully considered. It would seem, too, as though this woman were looking for some one, for through the slits in her veil she eagerly scanned the crowd, unheeding Achma, who followed her like a sleuth-hound.

Presently an old Sheikh called for silence. 'There is an Armenian woman here dressed as one of our own women,' he shouted aloud, and immediately this woman was dragged towards the group who had consented to conversion.

A great yell rose from the crowd. The incident promised a new excitement. Old Achma's eyes were filled with savage joy.

Instantly the woman's veil was torn from her face, and those near her saw a young girl, fair to look upon, pale to the lips, but with steady determination in her eyes.

'Are you not a Christian—an Armenian?' asked the Sheikh. The girl looked round the crowd, but never opened her lips. 'Give her a taste of the bayonet,' shouted a Turkish officer; 'that will make her speak.'

Achma spoke eagerly to the Sheikh, who nodded his head in approval.

'No, no,' he said, 'we must be kind. Mercy must ever be shown, when it will not harm the faithful. If this woman is a Christian, as I am assured she is, then our mercy will lead her to see the error of her ways, and she will embrace the one true faith. Come, my dear, renounce your errors, and you shall be forgiven.'

The girl looked at him with set, stony features, but spoke no word.

'Allah is merciful,' went on the old Sheikh, 'if you will embrace the Faith you shall live in Paradise. If not,' then he uttered a threat which I will not set down.

A great yell rose to the lips of the Turkish soldiers, while the German officers who stood by laughed coarsely.

'See,' said the old Sheikh, 'all shall be done decently and in order. Here is a cross for you to trample on, here is a Koran for you to kiss. Allah is merciful.'

He handed the Koran to the girl as he spoke, while a deathly silence fell upon those around her.

Quick as lightning she drew a revolver from under her cloak and pointed it towards her face. But before she could fire a man, who had been spoken of as a wild dervish from the hills, leapt forward and snatched the revolver from her hand.

'Adana! no, not that!' he cried.

It was thus that Victor Alexandropol tried to save the woman he loved.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A MADMAN'S PLAN

IT was pure madness on Victor's part, but he could not help himself. He did not realize that Achma had outwitted him at last, and that this scene was something he had hoped and planned for.

Achma had visited the American Mission early in the morning after Adana and Urmia had been taken to old Ismayl's house. He had come with a warrant to search the building from floor to ceiling, and he had been convinced that none he came to seek were there. Where they had been taken he had no idea, and although every facility was at his disposal for searching the whole city, he knew he would not be able to find them, unless extraordinary means were taken. That they had not left Erzerum he had assured himself. Every outlet was under guard, so that no suspicious persons could leave or enter without the knowledge of the authorities. German cunning, aided by the Turks' subtlety had accomplished this. The country was at war, so every precaution could be taken without question.

He knew, therefore, that they had entered the city but had not left it. He hoped to find them at the American Mission, but in this he was disappointed. After having given his orders, old Achma sat for a long time deep in thought. He had promised Djevdet Bey that this time his desires should be satisfied, that he should drink to the full both of love and of revenge.

He knew, too, that if he failed, his own life might pay the forfeit of his failure. If he succeeded, not only his own greed but his own desire for vengeance would be gratified. And he had sworn to succeed. Three times he had been foiled, and although his task seemed harder than ever, he determined not to be beaten again.

Hour after hour he pondered over the situation, and presently his eyes flashed with evil joy. He reflected that in a few days the order which had been given to deport all Armenians was to take place. He remembered his conversation with Adana, who had deceived him in Danana. A hundred times he had cursed himself for his witlessness, his credulity, and his blindness on that occasion. He had been the sport of a woman. He, Achma el Amad, who had boasted of having the wiliest mind in Asia Minor, had been outwitted, befooled, by a chit of a girl. She had learnt his secrets and had then left the town, and warned Victor Alexandropol.

But now he saw the means whereby all past debts could be paid. If he caused a search to be made throughout the whole city it would probably be unavailing, and would give warning of his intention. But if he gave it out that Victor Alexandropol had been arrested and would have to appear with the rest on the day when the Armenians were to be deported, and if his information were accompanied by threats of what was to become of this young man, who had been responsible for the defeat and death of thousands of brave Turkish soldiers, all Erzerum would hear of it, it would pass from lip to lip with the swiftness of lightning. And old Achma laughed with joy at the thought that wherever these girls might be hiding, they would hear of it.

There seemed only one flaw in the plan. What if they were all in hiding together at the same house? Or what if they had means of communicating with each other? The difficulty was grave and he did not see his way to overcome it. If it were given out that Victor Alexandropol was to be brought with the rest of the Armenians to the great open place, while these girls knew otherwise, then he would be laughed at as a bungler and a fool.

Then his heart gave a great bound. Ever since his return from the Eed-el-Kurban, whither he had resorted to prayer, the memory of the man who had knelt near him haunted him. He was like no one he knew, and yet he felt sure he remembered him. Then Achma gave a cry of satisfaction.

Rapidly he formulated his plans, and gave instructions. Thus, on the day when many hundreds of Armenians in Erzerum were massacred, and when many thousands started on their journey southward, Achma's hopes for revenge were fulfilled. The

news which he had diligently circulated that Victor Alexandropol had been discovered in his hiding-place and would be dragged with the other Armenians to the 'Pit of Gehenna'—the name given to the open place because of its bad reputation—had done what all his searching would have failed to do. It had drawn at least one of these women from her hiding-place, who doubtless had it in her heart to rescue the man who had more than once saved her.

But even Achma had not calculated upon so sudden a realization of his hopes. He had not calculated that the Armenian girl had prepared to take her life rather than suffer outrage; and it was this which had led Victor, regardless of all caution, to betray himself.

Achma laughed as he heard the young man's hoarse cry. He grasped the situation in a moment, and a few seconds later both Victor and Adana were prisoners.

Meanwhile the crowd which surged near looked on in bewilderment, while even the officials seemed to wonder what would happen next. A bayonet thrust, cruel murder and outrage, they could understand; but why was special treatment to be given to these two? But they soon understood. It was whispered that Djevdet Bey had given special orders concerning them, and Djevdet Bey, although not Governor of Erzerum, was so great a man that his word was law.

But for the protection of the Turkish soldiery, Victor would have been torn to pieces by the infuriated populace. The name of Ibram Alexandropol was still remembered by the older Turks, while his son had betrayed the Turkish cause and thus prepared the way for their disaster. This aroused them to wild fury. Nothing but the belief that he would suffer the most cruel and lingering torture at the hands of the officials kept them from venting their mad rage upon him in the open place.

'You are a great man, Achma, and your shadow will grow still greater,' said an old Turk to whom Achma had confided his plans on the previous day. 'You ran a great risk; but your ruse succeeded.'

'I know when to be cautious, and I know when to take risks,' he said with a complacent smile. 'The capture of that man will be worth more to us than the death of all these swine,' and

he nodded contemptuously towards the crowd of victims, who were waiting for what should happen next.

' You believe he hath secrets of the Russian army ? '

' I know he has. He came from the Grand Duke only a little while ago, and he was a trusted officer.'

' And you have your own methods for getting the truth from him ? '

' What would you ? ' and Achma laughed gleefully.

' And the girl—she is Djevdet's fancy, I suppose ? '

Achma nodded. ' He would give his right eye and his right hand for her. Why Allah permits it is a mystery, but the greatest of men become fools for a woman's smile.'

' But you told me there were two. It seems that you've only got one of the pretty birds ? '

' And how long do you think it will take to get to know where the other's cage is ? There were three I wanted to entrap, and my snare was sufficiently well laid to get two of them. Having got two, I will learn the hiding-place of the other, and they shall never escape me again.'

' This fellow has outwitted you many times.'

' That is the best of never giving up,' and again Achma laughed contentedly. ' It is said of Englishmen that they never know when they are beaten, while men of other countries give up when the odds are against them ; but the odds are never against me, because I know how to watch and to wait. Once, twice, thrice, he has seemed to outwit me, but I have gone on all the same. I marked that man for my prey at the beginning, and now——'

' But you are late, my friend, with the woman. Djevdet left Erzerum this morning.'

' Birds can be kept in a cage without losing their feathers,' replied Achma sententiously, ' aye, and be made to learn new songs, too, while they are imprisoned. Come, let us get away from the howl of these Armenian dogs, I have no further interest in them.'

By this time Adana was closely veiled again. But it was evident that she was to be treated with great consideration. No act of hostility was shown towards her after she had been torn from Victor's arms. Only once had she seen his face, and caught the look in his eyes. But it was evident that she realized

what he had done. He had made a mad, futile attempt to save her ; but she seemed to glory in his madness.

Victor, however, was bound hand and foot, while from the mad look in the eyes of those who bound him it was evident that no mercy was to be shown to him. The manacles by which he was bound cut his flesh, and more than one Turk struck him cruelly. But he made no protest, uttered no sound. He was careless as to what happened to him. He felt that the end had come now ; he had done his best, and he had failed.

Presently he realized that he was separated from Adana. She had been taken, whither, he knew not, while he was led along by soldiers through narrow streets, until presently he found himself in an evil-smelling den, evidently a cellar, the floor of which was covered by a layer of straw.

Only one ray of light penetrated his prison. It came from what looked to him like a grating in the wall. He heard the distant shout of voices, but nothing came to him distinctly. His body was sore with blows and his wrists were bruised and bleeding. But he was alone : that fact brought him comfort. At any rate he would have time to think, time to try to understand the situation. The manacles had been taken from his wrists, too, and he could use his limbs freely ; that was all to the good.

He walked to and fro in the cellar, and tried to outline the situation. But his brain refused to work. The tensity of his life during the last few hours was having its effect ; he was utterly worn out, exhausted nature demanded rest. He threw himself on the straw, and although his mind was seething with bewildering thoughts, he fell asleep instantly.

When he woke he was in dense darkness. Not a ray of light illumined his prison ; silence reigned supreme. He concluded that he must have slept for several hours. Why, he did not know, but he rose to his feet, and placing his hand against the wall, felt his way round. He wanted to understand the geography of the cellar. When he found the door, he had a feeling of satisfaction. It was locked, of course, but he was glad he knew where the door was. Then he sat down again, and fell to thinking. His mind was no longer dull and confused. Everything appeared before him in clear, distinct outline. He remem-

bered not only events but the meaning of those events came to him. Yes, Achma had outwitted him, beaten him. He had played the last move in a game and by that move he had won.

But had he? While there was life there was hope. He would have time to think about himself presently; it was the fate of Adana which troubled him. Why should she have come to that awful place on the day of all days, when every Armenian was a victim of Turkish cruelty?

Hour after hour he sat thinking, until his brain was in a whirl. The helplessness of his position and Adana's peril drove him to a frenzy. He thought he saw grinning devils all around him, while the souls of the people he had seen murdered filled the cell.

'I must be mad,' he thought, 'that is it. *I am mad!* What I have gone through has turned my brain, and I—'

He started to his feet again. The thought filled him with terror. If he lost his power of thinking, he would be helpless. He would be a prey to the man who had vowed his death. He would die like a rat in a hole, and die amidst agonies untold.

'O God, help me!' he cried. 'Great God, help me!'

Suddenly he laughed outright. The thought which had been born in his mind could only be the spawn of a madman's brain. And yet it might seem as though God had answered his prayer.

'If I am mad,' he cried, 'I'll *be* mad!'

He remembered the old Turkish superstition that the man whom Allah had touched with madness must be treated kindly by all His creatures. Thus it had become a part of the Mohammedan faith never to harm a madman. He was ever treated with special leniency, special kindness.

'Great God, I thank thee!' he said again and again.

An hour later he knew by the dim light which pierced the grating in the wall that the day had come. He had been for many hours without food, his strength had been buoyed up by his thoughts. He knew he would be visited shortly, but he was ready to play his part. The very clothes he wore would help him.

Presently he heard footsteps and the murmur of voices. He was to be visited, then. He found an angle in the cell and sat down amidst the straw. Thus it was that when Achma, accompanied by two others, entered bearing lighted torches, they saw only a gibbering madman crouched against an angle of the wall.

CHAPTER XXIX

HOW VICTOR PLAYED HIS PART

A CHMA and the two officers who had accompanied him looked at each other in dismay. Yes, there could be no doubt about it. The creature who lay on the straw was bereft of his senses. He was gabbling all sorts of incoherent things, and grinning like a maniac. His hair was tousled, his eyes were wild, and his clothes torn. Now and then he burst into snatches of song, and uttered strange cries.

'It has been too much for him,' said one of the officers, 'his mind has gone. Allah hath touched him.'

Achma looked at Victor for several seconds without speaking. A hundred thoughts were passing through his brain; he was trying to understand what it meant. He had built much on this visit; greed, ambition, revenge, all played their part in the hopes which filled his mind. But madness was a thing which had never occurred to him. He was like a man who had been starved for many days and who, when he suddenly found himself before a rich banquet, was forbidden to eat.

He took a step farther into the cell, and caused the torch to be held close to Victor's eyes. The young man looked up with a laugh.

'Get up,' said Achma.

'Get up!' said Victor. 'What for? I have been so busy in the darkness, and it has been great fun, counting straws, counting straws. Did you ever try it: one, two, one, two, up to twenty, and then—count them again?'

He laughed as he spoke, and then rose to his feet.

'Beautiful buttons! beautiful clothes!' he giggled, pawing Achma's coat. 'Where did you come from?'

'Silence!' snarled Achma. 'What do you mean by this gibberish?'

'Oh, the darkness has been glorious ! Just dark—dark—but I have had all sorts of company. Two devils came and stood by my side : they told me I must count the straws. I counted, and counted, and counted, but there seemed to be no end to them. But I will do it, oh, yes, I will do it.'

Then he stretched out his dirty hand again and patted Achma's uniform. 'Pretty clothes,' he said, 'pretty clothes ! But do you know what the devils did to me ? They took away all my past. Do you know I have no past ? Are you a wise man—will you tell me who I am ? What is my name ?'

'Name !' snarled Achma. 'You are the spawn of Ibram Alexandropol.'

'Alexandropol ! Isn't it funny ? What a glorious thing to have a name ! Where did I come from ? But I smell something. Oh, yes, I smell something. I am hungry, hungry. Will you stay here while I eat ? If you don't the devils may come and take away my food. But I wonder whether they were devils after all. You see, they were so kind to me, they gave me something to do. "Count straws," they said, "count straws." Do you think Allah sent the devils ? Once during the darkness I heard singing, singing, singing—but it was a long way off, a very long way off. And then, when I counted the straws, they rustled, and then I couldn't hear the singing. But perhaps Allah sent the angels to sing, don't you think so ? Will you give me a knife ?'

'A knife ! What for ?'

'I might kill the devils,' and he laughed gleefully at the thought.

Again Achma and the officers exchanged glances, but Victor took no notice. He went on gibbering, sometimes about one thing, sometimes about another, and again burst into wild, hilarious laughter.

At the end of ten minutes the three men left the cell, Achma looking very solemn.

'It has been too much for him,' said one of the officers. 'He knew what you meant to do with him, and fear drove him mad.'

Achma did not speak. He was too chagrined, too filled with wonder.

'At least we can kill him,' he said presently, 'after all, he will be out of the way then, and he can do no harm.'

At this one of the officers shook his head. He was a brutal man and belonged to the worst type of the Turkish soldier, but he was superstitious beyond words.

'Kill a madman!' he cried. 'No, that would not do. The curse of Allah would rest on us for ever.'

'But he is a Christian, an Armenian!' snarled Achma.

'Yes, but Allah hath touched him with madness. Does not the Koran say, "Let him who hath been stricken with madness have mercy shown unto him, because the voice of Allah comes to him whose mind hath been torn in twain"?'?

'The voice of Allah come to an Armenian Christian!' cried Achma. 'As well say the devils in the pit of flame share in the joys of the saints in Paradise. Whatever he is now, he was a traitor; through him we lost the great battle, when the New Year was dawning. I tell you, he must be tortured and killed.'

'The Governor would not hear of it,' was the reply. 'Even the people would rise in fear and anger and cry aloud at such a thing.'

'What, against an Armenian! Have not the people stood by and cheered while Armenian children were bayoneted, while old men and women were shot down, and while boys were thrown to the flames?'

Still the Turkish officer remained obdurate.

'The blessing of Allah would never rest upon those who tortured a madman,' was his reply. 'We must tell the Governor, and act as he shall see fit.'

The next day Victor was again visited in his prison, not only by Achma, but by the Governor of Erzerum and a German doctor. Achma had determined to leave no loophole of escape, and had not only insisted upon the enormity of Victor's crime but had urged that a Turkish doctor might be influenced by foolish superstitions, and thus treat Victor's case more lightly than it deserved. Evidently, too, he made a great impression upon the Governor, who, while he ostensibly was responsible only to the Turkish Government, stood in awe of the German officials, whose attendance on him was constant. Still he, like the rest of his people, held fast to the belief that it would be displeasing to

Allah to treat a madman with cruelty. But he yielded to the request that a German doctor should examine Victor. Indeed, the Germans had been very insistent about this, and gave Dr. Reisbach instructions that his examination of the prisoner should be thorough and searching.

It was with the idea, therefore, that Victor was shamming madness that Achma accompanied the Governor and the doctor to the cell. Dr. Reisbach, moreover, had had much experience with cases of insanity, and determined to use every known test to make assurance as to the real state of the prisoner's mind. All felt that Victor might possess information which would be of great value to the Russian generals, and seeing he had been the means of bringing calamity upon them in the past, determined to show him no mercy.

It would be painful for me, as well as wearisome to the reader, to describe all the devices that were used in order to discover whether Victor's madness were real or only assumed. Dr. Reisbach was a fatherly-looking old gentleman, with round staring eyes which were partially hidden by thick glasses. His stubby white hair stood on his head like a brush. His manner was intended to be benignant in the extreme. But, as may be imagined, Victor had carefully thought out his plan before acting. Throughout the long hours which had elapsed between Achma's visits he had reflected deeply on what might take place, and he had grimly determined to suffer any and every torture rather than betray himself. He kept up the rôle which he had adopted on the previous day, of an imbecile maniac. Thus, whatever they did, he met them with the same insane giggle, the same idiotic gabbling.

Dr. Reisbach passed from method to method with quick, sudden transition, which only had the effect of more than ever bewildering the victim. Threats, promises, wheedling remarks, and sudden, searching questions, only brought forth the same unsatisfactory results. Both the doctor and the Governor were convinced in spite of themselves.

'Either he is as cunning as the devil or he is a madman,' said the doctor to Achma, after the examination was over.

'He is the former, I tell you,' snarled the old Turk; 'he played with us before, he is playing with us again.'

The doctor shook his head. 'I have had experience with cases of madness for thirty years,' he urged. 'I think I know their every trick, and I tell you this man is mad. I left no test untried. No man who is shamming could have withstood that to which I put him.'

'Then are we to be beaten,' cried the old Turk; 'after we have got him in our hands, and knowing that he is acquainted with the enemy's plans, that he can tell us things which we want to know, are we not to make use of him? Put red-hot irons to his feet, I tell you; cut off his fingers one by one, and you'll get the truth out of him. His madness will disappear like mist before the hot sun.'

The German shrugged his shoulders. 'It is no use,' he said, 'the man is mad.'

'And it would bring upon us the wrath of Allah to persecute one whom He hath bereft of his senses,' urged the Governor.

'But are you going to do nothing more?' snarled Achma. 'Do you call what you have done to-day a test?'

'I do,' said the German suavely, 'but, my friend Achma, you will defeat your own ends if you do what you say. If he is not mad, then we must catch him with guile. We have tried the quick means of testing, now we must try the slow means. Still, I hold to my opinion that the man's mind is gone. He is only a grinning idiot, an irresponsible maniac.'

'What are your slow means?' snarled the old Turk.

'Make him believe that we have accepted him at what he appears to be, and then watch him. If he has been deceiving us, he will do in silence and loneliness what he would not do in our presence. Therefore put him into a place where he can be watched night and day. A man does not keep up a farce to himself, so let eyes always be upon him. Then the time will come when he is sure to betray himself.'

The next day Victor was given to understand that he was to be moved to a better and more comfortable room, and that he was to have good food. But he showed no signs of appreciation; still the same idiotic grin, still the same madman's babbling. From sunrise to sunset he was constantly watched. Should he show the slightest sign of sanity, reports would be made immediately and he would be treated accordingly.

Never surely had a man such a difficult part to play. But Victor played it. When to all appearances no one was near him, he wandered around his prison laughing wildly and uttering all sorts of insane gibberish. His jailers reported that for hours together he seemed to take delight in making curious faces. A looking-glass had been given him, and he would sit for long stretches of time contorting his features and singing meaningless songs.

At the end of a fortnight even Achma could not help admitting that he appeared to be mad, and that the shock he had received when he saw Adana attempting to shoot herself, and when thousands of his race were tortured and sent away to a lingering death, had bereft him of his reason. After this another consultation was held with the doctor, the result of which was that Victor was taken to a comfortable house where much kindness was shown him. But watchful eyes were never taken from him.

All this time Victor played his part. Throughout the daylight he never forgot himself, never once did he betray his real condition of mind by suggestions of sanity. Indeed, sometimes it seemed to him as though being mad were becoming second nature to him, and he almost feared that he would become really mad. But in the darkness of the night, when he was certain that no one could see him, he thought, and planned, and made resolutions.

The summer passed away. The hot sweltering days of August were followed by the cool breezes of September. The nights became cooler, the summer was passing away. Victor knew nothing of what was going on in the outside world, he dared not even make a show of interest. Still, prisoner as he was, imbecile maniac as he was supposed to be, the truth could not be altogether hidden from him. Hurried conversation of jailers, disconnected remarks, casual words by those who came to visit him, were all stored up in his memory and reflected upon in silence.

Then, when October came, something happened.

CHAPTER XXX

THE CIPHER MESSAGE

IT seemed but a little thing, and at first appeared to Victor as of no special significance. In order to keep up the rôle he had adopted he had at times shown gleams of intelligence to his jailers, and by the orders of Dr. Reisbach simple amusements had been placed in his way. A few picture-books and childish games had been given to him, and he had professed to look at them with a kind of insane curiosity. He reflected that some trap might be set for him, and he played his part accordingly.

Toward the end of October, however, a large parcel was brought to him, containing materials for a game often played by children in England. He noticed that it was made in Germany, and a little book accompanied it, giving explanations how the game should be played. It contained nothing suspicious, and nothing out of the ordinary, and yet the largeness of the parcel struck him as peculiar. Why should something be sent to him which, according to Turkish ideas, cost a great deal of money?

During his long months of incarceration he had naturally thought much concerning the treatment to which he was subjected. He had also learnt from his jailers that he was treated with special kindness because Allah had afflicted him with madness, that the good German doctor was doing his best to cure him, and that the amusements which had been brought to him were for the purpose of arousing his dormant faculties and for healing his mind. All the same, he wondered that this elaborate game, which was a kind of puzzle, should be given to him, and as I have said, he feared a trap.

For some time, therefore, he paid but little heed to the parcel. Now and then he turned over the pieces of the puzzle in a childish way, as though it were altogether beyond him.

Then suddenly his interest became intense. Among the papers used for wrapping up the parcel he saw a white sheet containing a number of figures. At first these figures appeared to be scribbled at random, without order or method. They were all written

in German fashion, and many of them were wellnigh obliterated by the creases in the paper.

In order to keep up the role he had adopted he appeared to regard them in a bewildered, insane fashion. Fearing lest his jailers should see his especial interest in them, he asked them to tell him what they meant. But the jailers laughed carelessly.

'They are only figures telling the number of years that Armenians will spend in the Pit of Flame,' said one.

'But they are so funny,' laughed Victor; 'I see them in my sleep sometimes. Still, I like them. They make me think of the straws I used to count in that first cell I lived in before I came here.'

'I expect some German shopkeeper wrote them when he was making up his accounts,' said another of his jailers. 'I will take away the paper and destroy it if you like.'

'No, no,' said Victor, 'they are so pretty. They interest me; I make stories about them.'

'Poor fool!' said the jailers one to another afterwards, 'it is nearly half a year now since Allah took away his mind. I think he will keep mad until he dies.'

'And then he will go to the Pit of Flame,' said the other.

'Who knows?' said the Turk. 'It may be that Allah will have mercy upon a madman, even although he was an Armenian Christian.'

Again and again Victor pored over the figures, but the more he looked at them the more he became bewildered. The hopes that they had aroused when he had first seen them began to die away. This was how they were placed—

- 1. 2. 5. 9.
- 1. 6. 2. 6. 11.
- 2. 4. 1. 6. 10.
- 9. 3. 4. 7.
- 12. 8. 9. 10.
- 15. 2. 3. 9.
- 3. 4. 2. 10.
- 4. 3. 2. 6. 8.
- 6. 8. 1. 11.
- 7. 2. 2. 9. 12.
- 8. 4. 3. 9.

The whole side of a sheet of paper was covered in this way, and although for a long time the figures conveyed no meaning to him, there were certain things which he could not help reflecting on. The first was that the figures in the first column grew in numbers. It began with 1, then 2, then 3, then 4, 6, 7, 8, and so on. This might seem as though it had a meaning.

These lists of figures haunted him night and day, but they baffled him; they seemed as confused as a madman's brain. Then, suddenly, as he lay one night, a thought struck him. What a fool he had been not to have thought of it before! Yes, there was a meaning, a purpose, in it all. He had found a key; the solution was in his hands! Yet was it? He could not tell for certain until daylight came, and it would be hours before the sun rose. How eagerly he watched for dawn I cannot describe. He felt as though everything depended upon the next few hours. No sleep came to him; his mind was too excited. He felt sure he had solved the mystery, and yet everything was so uncertain that he dared not hope.

With the first streak of dawn he stood near the window of his room, feverishly examining the book of instructions. Had he discovered the truth, or was his thought only a mockery, even as others had been?

The figures on the first line of the paper were, 1. 2. 2, 5, 9. He turned to page 1, looked at the second line, then eagerly examined the words 2, 5, 9, on the line. Then he turned to the sixth line, and read 2, 6, 11, and so on to the end. Yes, the parcel had been sent by a friend, and this jumble of figures, the meaning of which he had been so long in solving, was plain. First the page was given, then the number of the line on the page, then the figures indicating the number of the word on the line. In a few minutes he had read the message which his unknown friend had sent him.

This was how it appeared when the words had been set in their due order—

'Never give up hope. Those you have helped are safe, and will work for you. Keep up the part you are playing, and when the time comes, be ready to act. Whoever comes to you, show no wonder. Great things will come to pass, and escape is pos-

sible. Much patience is necessary. Your friends are working for you every day. Watch your keeper. Be careful; you will need all your strength. Do not expect too much at the beginning; hold on to the end, then victory.

His heart beat wildly with tumultuous joy. He was not forgotten. There was but one person he knew who was capable of conveying this message to him. It was Adana. She must have sufficient freedom and also sufficient means at her disposal to send him this. He was like a man who had been living for months in a dark cavern and who for the first time saw a ray of light. Hope surged triumphant through his being. The impossible became possible.

Only one part of the jumble of figures was still obscure. These were the numbers 25, 21, 19, 5, 6, at the end of the paper. The book of instructions did not help him at all. None of the words which corresponded with the figures in any of the pages had a meaning. But all this time his mind was intensely active. He reflected that these numbers closed the list of figures, and he began to think of all sorts of solutions. Presently the meaning dawned on him. These figures indicated the name of the person who sent the letter. He would spell it out according to the place of the letters in the English alphabet.

His heart became heavy as he did so. If Adana had sent it, they should have read 1, 4, 1, 14, 1. He thought of Lincoln, but the figures did not correspond. Then his eyes flashed with intelligence. Placing the letters in English order, they spelt YUSEF. To say he was disappointed was but to mildly express his feelings. He had hoped that Adana had sent the letter, when all the time it was Yusef. But was it?

For a long time he puzzled over the message he had received, and while many things were far from clear, the fact that he had helpers was plain. The incoherent and clumsy construction of the letter was accounted for by the fact that the words had to be picked out of the little book on instructions.

When his jailers came in at breakfast time, he was still the babbling maniac, and spoke to them after the fashion to which they had become accustomed. Still, he watched them closely, and tried to discover from their faces if anything new was to

happen to him. But nothing took place out of the ordinary, and several days passed without any further event of importance happening.

Then, on November 7, he noticed that he had a new jailer. He looked a young man about thirty years of age, with black flashing eyes, and a long black beard. He was accompanied by one of the old jailers, who had been with him from the beginning.

Victor's heart beat wildly, but he was careful not to betray himself. All the time he had been in prison two men had attended on him. It might seem as though those in authority were determined to give him no loophole of escape and that he was to be watched with double diligence.

'You see I have another comrade,' said the old jailer.

'Yes, I do not like him,' said Victor, creeping round the wall of the room, and looking at the newcomer out of the corners of his eyes, and grinning.

'Well, he won't stand any tricks, I can tell you,' said the Turk.

'I do not play tricks,' said Victor, giggling, 'but I don't like him. He makes me think of those devils that appeared to me and told me to count the straws.'

The Turk laughed. 'He is a devil in his way,' he replied.

'I want the old jailer,' said Victor. 'Why has this new one come?'

'Ask the Governor, or ask Captain El Abad—I don't know. There is your breakfast: eat it at once, and be thankful to have half such a good one.'

Victor gave a loud, hysterical laugh, but he kept his eyes upon the newcomer all the time. Then he gave a distinct start, for the new jailer gave him a look of intelligence.

Another three days passed and still Victor remained in the dark. The two keepers still continued to come together, but the new one gave him no further sign of intelligence. Indeed, he seemed to pay him no attention at all, and looked surly and disagreeable.

On one occasion Victor heard them talking outside the door of his room.

'I tell you,' said the newcomer, 'it seems nonsense to keep

two of us here to look after this silly fool. Why should a soldier such as I be kept on a work like this ?'

' That is what *I* think,' replied the old jailer. ' The man may be an Armenian, but he is perfectly harmless. I have been watching him now for six months, and I have never seen anything suspicious. His mind must have given way on the day when his people were deported southward, and when that pretty maid was taken prisoner. Still, there it is, we have to do as we are told. Besides, why need we grumble, we have an easy job. I'd rather be doing this than fighting the Russians.'

' Yes,' grumbled the other, ' but I am a soldier.'

' As to that, so am *I*. But the cold weather will soon be upon us ; think of what our men suffered last winter : thousands were frozen to death, while thousands more died of starvation. Here we are warm and comfortable ; we have plenty to eat, plenty of cigarettes, and nothing to do.'

' But what is the purpose in keeping two of us for a job like this ? '

' Strict orders,' was the reply. ' We were told never to go near the prisoner alone. He was believed to be dangerous.'

' Dangerous ! What, he ? I'd like to see him up to some trick. I'd quickly let him see what a follower of Mohammed thought of a dirty pig of an Armenian, even though he *is* mad. He is as weak as a kitten, too. All these months of confinement will have made his flesh as soft as that of a baby.'

' Of course they have,' was the reply ; ' still, we have to obey orders. All the same, now we know what sort of a fool he is, we can arrange for a good deal of liberty. I tried to persuade my old comrade, but he was afraid. But you are a different sort.'

' How ? ' asked the newcomer.

' We needn't be both on guard at the same time. You and I can arrange the matter together.'

' You mean that I am to take in the madman's food, alone, and be with him while he eats it ? ' and the new jailer spoke like one afraid.

' Why not ? Just now you said there was no need for both of us, and now, when I tell you how we can make our post a holiday, you grumble, and talk as though you were afraid. It is a week since I saw my family.'

' Ah, I see what you mean,' and the new jailer laughed significantly.

' Well, why not? Why should not one of us go to the cafés, while the other stays here? Why should not the other visit his wives and family, knowing that his comrade is doing all that is necessary? '

' Should we not be found out? '

' Not if we make our arrangements carefully. Oh, I've been here a long time and I know the ropes. If you are guided by me, we can have an easy time.'

This led to a long altercation, to which Victor listened eagerly. When they were gone, he lay down in the corner of his prison, and was for a long time motionless.

The next night, at supper time, he was especially eager and watchful. He started at every noise. Again and again he crept to the barred window, and looked at the yard which had been his only prospect for many weeks. He seemed to be calculating the strength of the bars and measuring the height of the wall around the yard.

Presently he heard a stealthy footstep, and the door opened. It was the new jailer, who entered alone. For a few seconds the two eyed each other intently.

' Yusef! ' whispered Victor.

' You know me, then, Howajja? ' and the lad's voice trembled with excitement.

' I knew you from the first; how did you get here? '

Yusef did not reply for some time. He looked eagerly round the room, then going to the door peered into the dark passage.

' I put on ten years to my age by growing this long beard,' he said, ' and you taught me how to make myself look older.'

' Yes, but how did you get here? '

The lad grinned. ' I learnt that Captain El Abad was chief in command here. I passed for a Turk, and watched for my opportunity. It needed great patience, great care. But opportunities always come, Howajja, to those who wait and watch. I rendered him a service; he thinks I saved his life. He is a great lord, is Captain El Abad, son of a Pasha, and I prevailed upon him to take me as his servant. Was not that one of the plans we discussed, master? '

'I see! I see!' cried Victor. 'But what of the lady Adana, Yusef? Have you seen her? do you know where she is?'

'Patience, master. You have told me many times that before we can *act*, we must *know*. For many days I did nothing but learn. But I kept my eyes open; I listened. My new master was so thankful to me that he gave me many opportunities.'

'Yes, yes, but tell me of the lady Adana.'

'Patience, master, and remember another thing which you have told me: always keep very cool, keep calm, never lose your head. The lady Adana is safe, Howajja; she has played what you call a risky game, but she is safe. There is nothing to fear for her.'

Victor gave a trembling sigh. It seemed as though a burden were rolled from his heart.

'Tell me what you mean, Yusef.'

'Captain El Abad is a great man. He even defies the Germans. He is in their secrets; he knows their plans.'

'Yes! yes!' and Victor's eyes flashed.

'Howajja sees, eh?' and again Yusef laughed. 'Captain El Abad is ambitious, and he hates Djevdet Bey. He wants to be Governor of Van. This also I discovered: he has lived in Europe, he has been to England, he knows the ways of Christians; and, master, remember your repeated advice to me to keep a cool head. He saw the lady Adana on the day you were taken prisoner, and to see the lady Adana is to love her. No, no, do not be angry; she is safe, no harm will happen to her. Ah, she is clever, Howajja; her mind sees a hundred things at once, it pierces the darkness just as the evening star pierces it when there is no moon. Soon after I became Captain El Abad's servant, I was sent with a message to her. Through her I became jailer here.'

'Through her? How was that?'

'I do not know; it was her clever brain that managed it. But what does it matter now? She has done it.'

'Then who sent me these things?' and Victor pointed to the puzzle game.

'I know nothing of that,' replied Yusef. 'I only know the great Captain is a child in her hands. He thinks he is clever. Have you seen the boys squeeze oranges in the streets, Howajja?'

They take an orange, and when they have finished with it there is nothing but pulp. That is how the Captain is when she talks with him. She squeezes his brain dry, but he does not know it. He would do anything to win her smile, he, the proud Turk, and she, an Armenian Christian! He fears Djevdet Bey, too, although he hates him, and he is seeking to be Governor of Van. There is something else, too, Howajja.'

'What?'

'The lady Erzinghan was brought to Van months ago, but she has escaped. No one knows whither she has gone.'

'Escaped! Impossible! Old Achma would place a dozen jailers around her.'

'Did I not tell you that the lady Adana's eyes pierced the night like stars?' cried Yusef.

'Then—then,' said Victor excitedly, 'you mean that—'

'I mean that the lady Erzinghan would want to be with her daughter,' was Yusef's reply. 'I mean that Captain El Abad has much power, and that the lady Adana—What do you call it?—twists him round her finger, so! But I must go now. I must not arouse suspicion; I have already stayed too long.'

'But tell me—' and then Victor spoke in quick, hurried sentences.

'I cannot say as to that,' was Yusef's reply, 'but in three nights I will come again, and I will be alone.'

'Then—' and again Victor spoke almost feverishly, while Yusef listened with wild, staring eyes. Evidently his own master's proposals startled him.

'I will speak to the lady Adana,' he said.

When Yusef had gone, Victor lay alone in the darkness. A thousand wild hopes surged through his brain. He knew that the next three days would be the hardest part of his imprisonment, for although hope filled his horizon, the waiting would be terrible.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE ADVANCE OF THE RUSSIANS

THE month of December, 1915, was a time of great excitement in Erzerum. Soldiers thronged the old city, the roads around were filled with transport wagons ; horses, motor-cars, troops, were to be seen everywhere. Guards were doubled, while thousands of men were at work on the old Erzerum forts, and feverishly digging trenches in other directions.

'We have been betrayed, betrayed !' cried the Moslems one to another. 'The Germans are failing us.'

'Nay, nay,' cried others, 'it is the vengeance of Allah.'

'How can it be the vengeance of Allah ? Have we not obeyed Him ? Is there an Armenian in the city ? Have we not murdered them by the thousand, and driven others away to their death ?'

'Yes, but do not the German infidels rule our armies, govern our country ? Curse the day whenever we saw them ! Curse the day when we ever took their money ! But for them we should have beaten back the Russians, and now they are marching upon us ! The wounded men who are coming back tell us that they are nearing our forts and will soon fire upon us. Erzerum is in danger.'

'Do not fear,' cried others of a different opinion. 'We have placed a wall of steel all around Erzerum. We can hold it against the whole Russian Army. Whatever they do, they cannot get to us.'

'Yes, but they have advanced from the Caucasus. Some say they are only twenty miles from Erzerum, while many Armenians have fled to them to find safety. Sometimes we can hear the Russian guns.'

'There were not many Armenians left to fly to them. Three-fourths of them are either dead or else sent away to Mesopotamia.'

'Except the women who have been converted,' laughed others, 'and they are nearly all young and pretty.'

'Even in the days of Abdul the Damned things were not as bad as they are now.'

'Down with the Government of the Young Turks! They promised peace, and gave us bloodshed. They promised plenty, and gave us famine. They promised liberty, and gave us slavery. Their cry was, "Turkey for the Turks," and they have placed the infidel Germans over us!'

There could be no doubt that the populace of Erzerum was greatly excited. Their soldiers had been driven out from the northern part of Asia Minor, and in spite of German boasts they feared their old capital would be taken. Outwardly they paid homage to the German officers, but in private they cursed them. Even the Turkish leaders grew doubtful. It was true that through German money railways had been made; through German influence, too, and because of German plans, the Turks had destroyed the great mass of Armenian Christians. But there were many who did not rejoice in it. Stories unparalleled in history reached the town. Many of the older Turks grieved that such horrible outrages should have taken place. Some declared that they could never forget the smell of burning flesh, or the screams of agony which rent the air when the Armenians were tortured. Some even went so far as to say that the Armenians had behaved with good feeling, and had added to the wealth of the country, and by their superior intelligence and skill were the greatest friends that Turkey had.

But these dared not speak aloud. Germany ruled, and Germans had impressed the Turks with the idea of their invincibility.

'What should we do now but for Germany?' many pro-Germans cried. 'It is Germany who is supplying money to fight this holy war; it is Germany who is giving us officers and preparing plans; through Germany we shall beat back the Russians just as they have been beaten back in Poland.'

So people talked, and so excitement prevailed. In many respects the city was in a state of siege. The price of food rose

to heights unknown before, and fear pierced the hearts of many.

On December 17, the Grand Duke Nicholas won a great success in Persia, and in spite of German intrigues the Russians occupied the city of Kum, and pro-Germans fled in wild disorder.

This was the story of December, 1915. It was still maintained that the Turks had victory in their hands, because of the tremendous plans the Germans had made. But the people could not help reflecting that for a whole year they had made no advance, while the Russians were fighting them on every side.

It was on Christmas Day of 1915 that Yusef visited Victor's prison. As far as the old jailer's reports were concerned, no change had taken place in the prisoner's condition. He was still mad, so he said, and although he occasionally showed signs of intelligence and sanity, he was still stricken by Allah.

But had the Turk seen him when Yusef visited him that night, he would have altered his opinion.

'Is everything prepared, Yusef?' he asked, 'can I escape to-night?'

Yusef shook his head. 'Three days, five days, seven days, Howajja—but certainly in seven days.'

Victor heaved an impatient sigh.

'It is your own fault, Howajja,' said Yusef.

'My fault? How?'

'Because you would have her to obtain the German plans,' replied the youth.

'And will she get them?'

'I told you that she holds him in the hollow of her hand,' was the reply. 'But great care is needed. Great as he is, he is afraid of the Germans. Have you kept your sinews hard, or are they soft and pulpy? You will need all your strength for what lies before you.'

Victor seized a heavy wooden chair, which was part of the scanty furniture of the room, and held it at arm's length as though it were a feather.

'That is good,' said Yusef; 'it is wonderful, too.'

Victor laughed. 'It was a part of my plan to keep myself fit,' he said, 'as a madman I could do it. I leapt, I ran, I turned somersaults, I threw my bed from one side of the room to the other, not only to keep up the part I was playing, but to save

myself from despair and to keep my muscles strong. You need not fear, I will not fail you.'

Slowly the days passed away, but there was no further visit from Yusef. Those days were full of the agony of suspense. He could not understand the waiting. A thousand fears filled his mind lest something untoward had happened. No news came to him from the outside world, although sometimes he fancied he heard the roaring of distant guns.

Five days passed, six, seven, and still no news. Then, at the close of the seventh day, Yusef entered alone, with a look full of expectancy and yet of apprehension in his eyes.

'We must go to-night, at once,' he whispered.

'Yes,' cried Victor eagerly, 'you have made your plans?'

'I have made such plans as I could; but she has failed.'

'Failed! Who has failed?'

'The lady Adana. She could not get the plans. She tried every device, but the man would not bring them. Perhaps he could not.'

Victor was silent for a moment. He realized, as he had never realized before, the difficult part Adana had to play. If she aroused the Turk's suspicions everything would be lost. And yet what excuse could she have for desiring possession of the plans of the fortifications of the ancient city, without doing so? Captain El Abad might be in love, but he was a keen Turkish officer, and he would have to give an account of his doings to the Germans, who were rigid in their discipline and terrible in their punishments.

Victor sighed. 'But if I can be free,' he said eagerly, 'if I can once get away from this city and join the Russian forces—'

'There are a thousand chances to one,' said Yusef. 'I too have had a difficult part to play, master, for every man suspects his brother man. Turks are afraid of Germans, and Germans doubt the Turks. Besides, the Germans are secret as the grave. In spite of all they have been able to do, the Russians have gained ground; they have pressed the Turks back nearer and nearer this city, and I heard a German say to Captain El Abad yesterday that nothing but the strictest adherence to his plans could save us. I saw the plans, master.'

'You saw them?'

Yusef nodded. 'I saw them. A German general was discussing them with Captain El Abad. They were spread on a big table before them. I saw them pointing out places of defence and places of attack.'

'Great heavens!' cried Victor. 'If the Grand Duke had them, if he knew what was in the Germans' minds, he could be prepared, and strike accordingly!'

'Master,' said Yusef, 'will you risk much to get them?'

'I'd risk my life,' was the young fellow's reply.

'Listen,' whispered Yusef, and he took a piece of paper from his pocket, 'this is what the lady Adana has learnt. How much it is worth, I do not know, but she has written it down that you may read.'

Holding the paper close to the candle. Victor read eagerly, once, twice, thrice. His face had become pale to the lips, his eyes burnt with an unearthly light. What his thoughts were, it is impossible to say; that he was much wrought upon was evident. Eagerly he asked many questions, to which Yusef replied as he was able.

That night, at midnight, when the old city of Erzerum was comparatively quiet, he crept to the only window of the room where he had been so long imprisoned. He had scarcely put forth his strength, when the window yielded to him, and he was able to remove such of the bars as enabled him to pass through. He heard a clock striking. It was the last minute of the year 1915. He listened, every nerve tense and with hands clenched, till the last sound of the clock had died away.

'The New Year,' he said to himself, 'and I am free. May God help me to do what I have to do!'

It seemed to him an omen for good. He was free during the first minute of the New Year. His heart beat with confidence and with determination.

Creeping across the courtyard, he saw a rope hanging, and with the agility of a cat he climbed the rope, scaled the wall and dropped on the other side, and found himself in a narrow passage. Here he stopped and listened. Not a sound was to be heard. The pall of night enveloped the city.

'Surely he cannot have mistaken the time,' he reflected. 'If anything has happened to him, I am helpless.' All the same, he

determined that he would stop at nothing to retain his liberty.

A second later there was a stealthy step along the passage. He could see nothing, for the night was dark. An Egyptian blackness encompassed him. He heard a low cry, and knew that all was well.

For the next half-hour the two threaded their way through the by-ways of the ancient city of Erzerum. Victor knew that directly his escape were known, there would be a hue and cry. It was for him to get beyond the city walls before anything was suspected.

It was bitterly cold, a keen north-east wind which threatened sleet and snow was sweeping from the Caucasus, and it was freezing hard. But he did not feel it. Every nerve tingled with excitement, every power he possessed was strained to the utmost, for he had made up his mind not only to escape but to obtain the plans which Captain El Abad was that night taking to the officer who was defending the forts of Erzerum. There were a million chances to one not only against his doing this but even of his escape. Every soldier was on the alert, and when they drew near to the line they would be challenged in a hundred places. He knew that the Turkish army was under German command, and he knew, too, how thorough the Germans were. Still, a breath of freedom gave him new strength. The thought of obtaining the plans was like fire in his veins. Everything seemed to rest on a hair's balance, and what was one must be done quickly. There was no time for elaborate scheming, no time for explanations. His hope lay in quick, decisive action, and in accomplishing what seemed impossible.

Presently they reached the spot to which Yusef had been leading him.

'He must pass here,' whispered the youth. 'Two hundred yards yonder are the Turkish sentinels. In an hour from now we shall be either dead or we shall be doing big things.'

Victor laughed almost gleefully. The fire of youth, of excitement, of peril, was in his veins. He was like a gambler who is staking his all upon one throw of the dice.

The place Yusef had chosen was in one respect well suited to their plans. Dark olive trees bordered the way, and a quick turn of the road hid them from observers. On the other hand, it

was close to the Turkish lines, and a single shout would reach the ears of a hundred men. Behind them was the old city, asleep.

They heard the panting of a motor-car engine, and a second later saw that only the side-lights were lit. The vehicle came slowly along, for the road was ill-made and much cut up by traffic.

When it drew up close to the spot where the young men were, the chauffeur almost stopped.

'Turn on the head-lights for a moment,' said some one who was evidently in command, 'we shall see where we are then. I wish I had come on horseback instead.'

'It is they,' whispered Yusef, pressing Victor's arm, 'and there are only two.'

A second later Yusef had leapt on to the car, and seized the chauffeur by the throat. Almost as if by magic he had dragged him from his seat, so that his foot ceased to touch the accelerator, and the car stopped dead.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE FALL OF ERZERUM

ON January 23 of the year 1916, the Grand Duke Nicholas sat with some staff officers in a house a few miles north of the old forts of Erzerum. It was about ten o'clock at night, and they had just partaken of their evening meal. The house in which they had gathered was one of the few which had escaped bombardment, and so had been utilized by the Russian army as they came southward.

The officers were all men of high command, and had evidently come there that night to confer with their Commander-in-Chief. Nearly all of them were in high spirits.

Two days before they had successfully driven the Turks right back to the forts of Erzerum, and as a consequence it seemed to them that the storming of the forts and the taking of the city itself was only a matter of a few days.

'The fight is evidently out of them,' said one of the generals. 'I wish our men in the north had prospects as good as ours. Have you seen what Ferdinand has said to the Kaiser ?'

He spoke with a laugh, as though he was about to relate a joke.

'No, what is it ?'

'It seems that the Kaiser paid a visit to Ferdinand at Nish. A banquet was given to him on the 18th, at which the All Highest made a speech. Of course that was to be expected, he is always making speeches. But this speech of Ferdinand's at the banquet is beautiful. Here it is,' and he read from a newspaper—

'Hail, Emperor, Caesar, and King !'

'Thou art victor and glorious. In ancient Nish all the peoples of the East salute thee, the Redeemer, bringing to the oppressed prosperity and salvation.''

'I expect William was in a good temper after that,' and the

officer laughed as he spoke. ‘When he hears the news that the Turks have retreated to the forts of Erzerum, it may be his enthusiasm will be cooled a little.’

‘It will be a colder douche when the Erzerum forts are taken,’ laughed some one else. ‘How long do you say they’ll be?’

‘A week,’ some one replied.

All this time the Grand Duke had not spoken a word. While others had been laughing and passing pleasantries he had evidently been thinking of other things. No smile wreathed his lips, and there was a stern expression in his eyes. He did not appear to be at all hilarious.

He rose from the table and began pacing the room, his giant form dwarfing the other men. The officers nodded to each other as they saw him, and one who was his close friend railed him upon his woebegone appearance.

‘You look as though we had failed instead of succeeded.’

‘We have not succeeded,’ said the Grand Duke.

‘Not succeeded! Why, we have driven them back miles, right to the very forts of the old city!’

‘What is the use of that until we take the city?’

‘Why, the city is ours!’

‘Not while that ring of forts is occupied by the Turks.’

‘We will destroy that ring of forts as though it were so much cardboard,’ said the officer boastingly. He had partaken of a good dinner, and the excellent wine he had drunk had made him in a great good humour.

‘Before you can smash the forts you must know where they are,’ he said impatiently.

‘And we have a plan of them.’

‘How old is that plan?’

The officer was silent, for the Grand Duke’s tones were forbidding.

‘The Germans have been in Erzerum for more than a year—do you think they have been idle all that time? They are masters of fortifications, and there will be hidden forts by the hundred. Where are they? Until we know that—’ he shrugged his shoulders impatiently and continued to pace the room. ‘I wish you joy in your confidence, gentlemen.’

'Yes,' said a young general who had not yet spoken, 'if we could get a plan of them as they are to-day!'

'Exactly,' and the great general laughed grimly. 'But since we cannot, we have to go largely by guess-work, and that is what I don't like. I would give a million roubles to the man who could give me such a plan. But until I can get it—'

'Do you mean to say, then,' interrupted one, 'that all we have done is in vain, and that we must give up hope?'

'I never give up,' he spoke in the same stern tone; 'all the same, it is a foolish business to shout before you are out of the wood, or to play with a mad dog until his teeth are drawn. Good night, gentlemen, I go to work.'

He passed into another room, and spreading a map on the floor, lay flat on his face and began studying it minutely. Presently he rose with a sigh. 'There is nothing else for it, I am afraid,' he muttered; 'it will mean a tremendous loss of men, but there is nothing else for it.'

The Grand Duke's A.D.C. appeared at the door of the room.

'Pardon, your Highness,' he said, 'but there is something which may be of importance.'

'Yes, what is it?'

'A man outside demands to see you. Indeed he seems so much in a frenzy that—'

'Demands!' repeated the Grand Duke.

'Yes, your Highness. He says he has great news and *must* see you.'

'What reasons does he give?'

'I can hardly make out, your Highness. He looks more dead than alive. He is bruised and bleeding, he is a bundle of rags, and he is wounded into the bargain. He talks like a madman.'

'Where does he come from?'

'He says from Erzerum.'

'Erzerum!' There was a new interest in the Grand Duke's voice.

'Yes, your Highness.'

'What does he want?'

'He says he will tell no one but yourself, your Highness.'

'Where is he?'

'With the sentinels outside. Evidently he has had a rough

time of it. I don't know how he managed to get through our lines. But he says he has some valuable papers—how he got them, I don't know. He must have gone through an inferno to get here ; he seemed to have forced down every opposition.'

The Grand Duke hesitated a second. His mind was much occupied by the plans he had been studying and the difficulties which lay before him. He knew, although his generals had spoken lightly about taking Erzerum, that the task was prodigious, simply because they had not been able to get any accurate information concerning the new fortifications which had been built up under German supervision, and that the want of information might mean defeat. And the Grand Duke did not like defeat. He remembered that his prestige was at stake ; many had said, when he had been transferred to the chief command in the Caucasus, that his Imperial master had degraded him. He knew that the eyes of the world were upon him ; he knew, too, that much depended on whether he took Erzerum. That was why he was anxious, perturbed, and he was not in the mood to be disturbed by unimportant callers.

Only one thing made him hesitate, and that was the news that the man had said he had come from Erzerum.

'Very well, I will see him. Where is he ?'

He followed the orderly into the adjoining room, and a few seconds later a ragged, starved-looking wretch, evidently in a state of collapse, was brought in. His face was pinched with hunger, his eyes almost started out of his head, his lips were blue with cold and with famine. His clothes were torn and ragged, in many places only held together by pieces of string.

The Russian general was evidently moved by pity as well as by curiosity as he looked at him, although he wondered that he should have found it possible to obtain admission to his Headquarters.

'Who are you ? What do you want ?' He spoke roughly, although not without a suggestion of kindness.

The man shivered, and for some seconds seemed unable to speak. Then he gasped, 'I must—see you—alone.'

Again the general scrutinized him wonderingly.

'You say you have come from Erzerum ?'

'Yes,' gasped the man ; 'do you—not know—me ?'

The Grand Duke's eyes flashed like those of an eagle, and his moustache seemed to bristle as if with excitement. He moved a step nearer to him, and seizing a candle held it close to his face.

'Great heavens!' he said. 'Drink this,' he added quickly, and held a glass to the man's lips.

The man drank, and almost immediately colour crept back to his lips and cheeks. The strong stimulant gave him new life.

'You are starving,' said the Grand Duke. 'Give him food,' and he turned to the silent, watchful spectators.

'No, no, not yet! I must tell you all I know first. Yes, I am strong enough now—I must see you alone!'

The great soldier took the ragged creature by the arm and led him into the room which he had just vacated.

'Alexandropol!' he said.

'Yes, your Highness.'

The Grand Duke laughed. 'I was wondering what had become of you. You rendered us a great service more than a year ago.'

'I come to render you a greater one, your Highness.'

'But, man, you are fainting, you are a skeleton, you are bruised, bleeding, wounded.'

'That does not matter. I have got them!'

'Got what?'

'The new plans of the fortifications of Erzerum! I have instructions, too! I—I— Will you give me something more to drink? Then I shall be strong enough to—tell you—everything.'

'Drink! You want to eat, man.'

He went to the door and gave rapid commands, and a few minutes later Victor was eating like a famished wolf. He literally tore the food that was given to him; he would not use knife or fork, he ate like a primitive savage.

For some minutes the Russian general watched him with a grim smile upon his face and a look of expectancy in his eyes.

'Now you have eaten enough,' he said, and with his own hand he removed the plate away from him. 'How long since you had food before?'

'I don't know.'

'Anyhow, you have had enough for the time. Drink this. Are you strong enough to talk?'

'Yes, your Highness.'

The food and drink had given Victor new strength. The warmth of the room had thawed his freezing blood. He still felt giddy and weak, but he was no longer helpless.

'Now then to business,' said the general.

'Will you forgive me if first of all I ask that my servant and friend may be cared for?'

'Where is he?'

Victor told him, and again the Duke went into the adjoining room and gave rapid instructions.

When he returned Victor was divesting himself of some parchment which he had tied around his emaciated body.

'And you brought these from Erzerum? How did you get them?'

'I will tell you when you decide on their value. Look at them.'

For several minutes the Grand Duke studied them, giving only an occasional grunt.

'There is this also,' said Victor presently, and he passed a scrap of paper.

Like lightning the great soldier's eyes flashed from the written instructions to the plan. He saw that the latter could only have been prepared by a man who was versed in all the intricacies of fortifications; saw, too, its value.

Forgetful of his rank, forgetful of everything save his joy at obtaining what he longed for, he threw his arms around Victor's neck and kissed him.

'My lad, my lad,' he cried, 'you shall not go unrewarded for this!'

'That never entered my mind,' said Victor.

'But tell me how you got through; it must have been a miracle, man! Why, you have suffered hell in getting from there to here. How did you do it?'

'I had great good luck. Besides, I had Yusef. Without him I could never have done it. Still, we had some narrow shaves. At first I got on all right. I dressed myself in Captain El Abad's clothes, and took his papers.'

'Did you kill him?'

'No. That was why everything was so soon found out. They

hunted us like rats. God only knows how we lived during the next few days. Sometimes I think—no, I don't know what I think.'

The great soldier gazed at him steadily. He scarcely recognized the vigorous stalwart officer from whom he had parted several months before in the ragged, starved creature before him. His bones looked as though they would break through his skin, and he still appeared more dead than alive. Only his black eyes burned with the light of life.

'I'll get a doctor here. You need one. You need rest and nursing, too.'

'No, no, your Highness,' cried Victor eagerly. 'I know there is much you want to know. You have a hundred questions you want to ask me.'

'I have; but you are too weak to answer them.'

'No, I am not. Let me tell you while I am able. I may be too ill later.'

'I'll have a doctor in, anyhow,' replied the Grand Duke.
'Then we'll see.'

An hour later Victor sat in the great soldier's own chair before the fire, while he was plied with questions. Rapidly he told of all that had happened to him since the previous spring when he had passed through the Turkish lines. He noticed, too, that the Russian general clenched his hands and muttered fiercely as he described what had happened to the Armenians.

'Great heavens, Alexandropol,' he exclaimed when Victor told of the unnameable tortures which his people had suffered, 'do you mean to say that they made great fires and threw men, women and children into them?'

'I saw them, your Highness. The smell of burning flesh haunted me for days, and I shall never forget the look of savagery on the Germans' faces as the Turks yelled, "This is the kind of lions for Christians!" The sheer devilry of it was horrible. All law was suspended, men worked their will on their victims, and their will was the will of incarnate devils.'

'I have been called a hard man, Alexandropol,' said the Grand Duke, 'but as sure as there is a God in heaven, there shall be a reckoning day for this. I swear it, by God, I swear it!'

He strode to and fro in the room as he spoke, his eyes flashing,

his moustache bristling fiercely. ‘But you played a great game, boy,’ he went on, ‘a great game! I have often wondered about you since you left me. I feared you were killed, and yet I had a kind of feeling that you were not. You see I trusted you, and I believed that your brains could outmatch those of the Turks. Still, if any one had told me you could have done all this, I should have laughed at him. I should have said it was impossible. It is great, I tell you it is great!’

‘Are the plans valuable, then?’

‘Valuable!’ and the Grand Duke gave a great laugh. ‘They make the improbable a certainty! Your action is worth a score of your Victoria Crosses, and you shall not be forgotten! As for the lady—ah, what will not a man do for a woman! Tell me all you know of her.’

On February 11, the bombardment of Erzerum commenced. It was said by the people that never before was such a tornado of shells ever known. The Germans, who had boasted that before Erzerum could be taken the whole Russian army would be annihilated, began to look very grave after the second day’s attack.

‘Some one has betrayed us,’ they cried, ‘the hidden forts have been discovered, and by some means the Russians have got hold of our plans.’

‘Your boasts are worth no more than the tinkle of camels’ bells,’ cried the angry Turks, as one by one the hidden forts were located by the Russian guns and demolished. ‘If Erzerum is lost all Asia Minor is lost. It is one of our sacred cities.’

On the fourteenth and fifteenth of February blank dismay fell on the Turkish faces, and on the sixteenth the fear became a panic. For three days the mosque had been crowded with people who besought Allah for victory, and the Sheikhs and Mueddins became hoarse through shouting to the populace, and beseeching them to be courageous and hopeful. Thousands of the inhabitants left, shrieking in despair and calling down maledictions on those who had betrayed them. The whole city was in a condition of terror.

‘The Russians are Christians!’ the people cried. ‘They will have no mercy on us! They know what we did to the Armenians, and now they will wreak their vengeance on us. They will throw us into great fires as we threw the Armenians, they will

gouge out our eyes, cut out our tongues, murder our old men and children, and outrage our young women as we outraged theirs. All that we did to the Armenian Christians they will do to us. Allah is angry with us ! We shall all go down to the pit of flame !'

The tracks southward were filled with frightened people, who took as much of their goods with them as they were able, while day by day thousands of mangled Turks were brought into the city.

Then on the 16th of February, Erzerum surrendered to the victorious Russian army.

It was on a Wednesday when the last of the forts fell, and the same day Victor, who led a company of men, entered the city. Close behind him were Cossacks who uttered loud shrieking cries. Mad confusion reigned as company after company, battalion after battalion swept through the streets. The Turks who remained threw themselves on their knees before their conquerors, shrieking for mercy. They seemed to wonder, too, that no outrage was committed.

But not only did Turks throng the streets : others whom Victor recognized as his own people came, not to plead for mercy, but to utter shouts of welcome. They were but few, for the holocaust among them had been wellnigh complete, but those who had managed to evade the search, and who for months had been living in constant fear of their lives, now came forward with a new light in their eyes. The entrance of the Russians meant life to them.

Victor managed to get speech with some of them and questioned them eagerly concerning the fate of his friends. For some hours he could learn nothing ; but at length news came to him.

Yes, he was informed, it was well known that Achma el Amad had, at the command of Djevdet Bey, imprisoned the lady Adana Ulah. Her imprisonment had taken place on the very day that the deportation of the Armenian Christians had commenced. She had some days before escaped from her prison.

'Do you know what has happened to her since her escape ?' was his feverish inquiry.

'Yes ; she married the young American missionary from the Mission House. She escaped from Erzerum with her husband three days before the great bombardment.'

CHAPTER XXXIII

ACHMA AND VICTOR

THE blow had fallen ! The thing he had dreaded, yet expected, had come to pass. The woman he loved with every fibre of his being, and the very thought of whom had given him strength and courage, had given herself in marriage to another man. It was true she had helped him with rare courage and foresight, but all the time her heart had gone out in love to the young American. Her service for him had been inspired by friendship, and perhaps by gratitude for what he had been able to do for her ; but her love, her life were for another.

Of course he had no right to complain. Rather he ought to rejoice. As John Lincoln's wife she would be safe and happy. Doubtless by this time they were on the way to America, and he would never see her again.

He did not quite see how she had escaped from her imprisonment. It was true that Djevdet Bey had been kept with the Turkish forces, and his duties had kept him from returning to Erzerum, but he would have a hundred minions waiting to do his bidding. How then could Adana escape ? He knew how lightly the cordon of her imprisonment had been drawn. On the other hand, however, she might have been able to bribe Captain El Abad's servants, and thus find a way to liberty. But could she ? He knew the uproar which followed the attack which he had made on the Turkish officer. Heaven only knew how he had been tempted to kill him ! It was because he had not yielded to the temptation that his escape had been made all the harder. The knowledge of the attack, together with the loss of the plans and papers which Captain El Abad carried, had caused a double vigilance on the part of the Turks, and thus made his escape a miracle.

What he had suffered no one knew. He shuddered as he

thought of it. When the Grand Duke spoke of his escape as a miracle, his language was not too strong. As he reflected on it, he marvelled at it. Time after time all possibility of evading his pursuers seemed to be gone, and only by the mercy of Heaven had he and Yusef been saved from ghastly torture and a horrible death.

Was it likely then that Adana, who would probably be suspected by Captain El Abad of helping him, would be able to get away scot-free?

Yet his informant seemed confident, certain. How she had got out of her prison he did not know, but it was doubtless a fact.

'Do you know what has become of the lady Urmia Erzincan?' asked Victor.

'No,' was the reply. 'I only know through a servant at the American Mission, about the lady Adana Ulah. I was told that she escaped Djevdet Bey's prison, and had been married to John Lincoln, who had taken her away.'

The whole of Erzerum was in such a state of excitement that systematic inquiry was impossible. A great part of the city had been set on fire by the flying Turkish soldiers. Thousands of people were helpless and homeless, and went about the streets shrieking as though they were mad.

As soon as his duties would allow him Victor found his way to the American Mission, only to find it in a state of confusion. The head of the Mission had been called away, but one of the workers confirmed the story that John Lincoln was married, and had some days before escaped with his young wife.

From the American Mission he found his way to the house of the old Turk to which he, with Dr. Burt, and John Lincoln had taken the two girls many months before; but the house was empty. Evidently either the old man and his wife were dead or they had fled at the approach of the Russians.

He searched room after room, and to his surprise the furniture remained pretty much as it was on the night he had brought Urmia and Adana there. Nothing had been destroyed or disturbed. Many of the houses in the near distance were on fire, and the Russian soldiers were doing their best to extinguish the flames, but this one had escaped.

As he was leaving he saw an old man looking piteously towards the house.

' You know the people who used to live here ? '

The old man was evidently surprised to hear a Russian soldier address him in his own tongue.

' Yes,' he assented, ' I know them.'

' Where are they ? '

' You mean them no harm ? '

' No, I want to help them.'

He gave Victor a searching look, and then beckoned him to follow.

' They feared their house would be burnt with the rest, he muttered. ' That was why they went. But I loved the place, that was why I came back.'

' You were their servant ? '

' For more than forty years I have served them.'

' Tell me,' cried Victor eagerly, ' is the lady—'

' I must tell you nothing,' interrupted the old man; ' I can only take you where they are.'

He followed his guide to another part of the town, where presently they stopped before a house rather larger in dimensions than those around them.

' They are there.'

Victor entered, and in a few seconds stood face to face not only with the old Turk and his wife but with his father's sister.

' My cousin Urmia—is—is she well ? ' Victor stammered after the first excited greetings were over.

' Yes, quite well.'

' And you ? ' said Victor. ' I heard of your escape from the power of Achma el Amad.'

She started at the name and a look of terror came into her eyes.

' Oh, isn't it ghastly, awful ! Just as help came, too ! Just as our sky was beginning to be brighter.'

' I don't understand.'

' Didn't you know ? I forgot ; I am so confused, so mad with terror. That man's name—'

' What man's name ? '

' Achma el Amad.'

'What of him? He is powerless to hurt you now.'

'Yes, but he has her in his power!'

'Who? Urmia?'

'No, thank God she is safe!'

'Who then?'

'Adana. He has her prisoner, and it is said that he has dragged her from her prison and that he is with the retreating Turkish army.'

'But I was told that she had married John Lincoln, the young American!' gasped Victor.

'No, it was Urmia. Mr. Lincoln persuaded me to consent more than a week ago. I thought it best. It did not matter what became of me, but as Mr. Lincoln's wife my child would be safe, and so—'

But Victor did not wait to hear this or other explanations which under other circumstances he would have been eager to hear. Only one fact interested him. He must rescue Adana.

What could he do? He was an officer in the Russian Army, and therefore under orders. There was but one course for him to take, and he must take it. He would go and see the Grand Duke Nicholas.

Eagerly, feverishly he told his story to the Russian general, who listened to him with a curious twinkle in his eyes.

You are a stormy petrel, Alexandropol,' he said, when Victor had concluded his story. 'You seem to have a genius for playing a lonely game. But I cannot grant your request.'

Victor's heart was cold; but he made no remark. It was for him to obey his general's commands; indeed it was a mark of great favour to be granted this interview, especially at such a time.

'You will go to this address,' said the Grand Duke, giving him a slip of paper, 'you will ask the man who is guarded there such questions as you deem necessary, you will take such action as you deem fit, and report to me.'

Victor looked at the slip of paper in astonishment.

'I—I do not understand your Highness,' he said.

'I have no time to explain,' said the Grand Duke. 'I love officers with intelligence, and in the past you have not shown yourself a fool. There, that will do.'

Victor found himself dismissed, bewildered and torn with anxiety. His general, who had shown him so much kindness, had refused him his request, and he had sent him on a quixotic, errand. Still, he was a soldier, and he must obey.

He found his way to the house mentioned on the scrap of paper, and found that it was guarded by Russian soldiers ; a few seconds later he was led along a stone-paved passage, at the end of which a Cossack soldier stood with his bayonet fixed. The man saluted Victor as he opened the door.

Seated before a stove, in an attitude of abject misery, he saw old Achma el Amad.

Victor looked at him silently for a few seconds, taking in the whole situation at a glance. Achma was a prisoner. Doubtless the Grand Duke, on entering the city, had given instructions concerning the old Turk, or possibly by means of his secret agents he had discovered his whereabouts, and thus brought about his capture.

Victor's heart beat warmly at this, another evidence of the great general's kindness. The man of iron had showed that he possessed a heart. A thousand thoughts flashed through the young fellow's mind as he stood looking at the man who had been his constant enemy for nearly two years ; he wondered if the wily old Turk knew the whereabouts of the woman he loved. It was through him Adana had been taken prisoner and placed in a house belonging to Djevdet Bey, and he had no doubt that Achma had full instructions from Djevdet to guard her safely.

The fact that it was not Adana but Urmia whom John Lincoln had married had changed everything. At first Victor had been almost beside himself with joy, even although he believed that she was in the power of Achma and that an awful fate was in store for her. He had been almost maddened when the Grand Duke had refused his request that he might go in search of her. Now, however, it came to him that, although she was not the wife of John Lincoln, she could be nothing to him but a friend. Even although no pledges had passed between him and Ethel Tregenna, he believed himself bound to her by ties of honour.

Still, his duty was none the less clear, and every fibre of his being emphasized it.

For some seconds he stood silently gazing at the old Turk, who, with his chin sunk upon his chest, sat gazing into vacancy. All hope had evidently gone out of his life. He had been taken prisoner by the conquering Russians, and he knew that he could expect no mercy. He had been one of the foremost in carrying out the German schemes for annihilating the Armenian Christians, and knew that he would have to pay the penalty of his deeds to the utmost farthing.

In spite of the past, a feeling akin to pity crept into Victor's heart as he watched him. Nevertheless, he knew that a hundred schemes were being concocted in the old man's subtle brain, and that he would have to play his part carefully.

'Allow me to express the hope that your honour is well.'

Achma started like a man stung, and no sooner did he see Victor than his eyes glittered like those of a snake when aroused from its torpor. If Victor had grasped the situation, so also had Achma. But the old man did not speak. Instead, he kept his eyes fixed on his visitor, as though waiting for him to make the first move.

'The ways of fate are not easy to be explained,' went on Victor. 'the victors of one day are the prisoners of the next.'

'When a man is as old as I, and the spark of life has almost died out,' was the old Turk's reply, 'little matters. My hopes lie in Paradise, not in this world.'

'Yet it is but a few weeks ago that Achma el Amad, wise in counsel and wonderful in resource, was spoken of as the future Governor of Aleppo,' and Victor watched him closely as he spoke.

Although his face was like a mask, his eyes gleamed at the words. Failure and the fear of death had not altered his nature.

'I imagine you do not expect mercy from the Grand Duke?' went on Victor after a moment's pause.

'Allah is mighty!'

'But evidently it is not the will of Allah that Erzerum should remain in the hands of the Turks. The cry of my murdered people has gone up to Heaven.'

'Sorrow endures for a night, but joy cometh in the morning,' said Achma piously. 'As you said just now, the victors of one day become the prisoners of the next. Still, I would have you

remember this : it is not the faithful followers of Mohammed who are responsible for what has happened to the Armenians. Constantinople is under the rule of Germans. That is why such as I have had to do deeds which made our hearts bleed. They are the wolves who have preyed upon the helpless.'

' And you have felt pity for the helpless ? '

' Allah is my witness that I have.'

' I am rejoiced at that,' said Victor, ' it may help to make everything easier, especially if you prove your words by deeds.'

' I am helpless,' said Achma, ' I can do nothing.'

' That is a pity,' said Victor meaningly.

Achma looked at him questioningly.

' That is a pity,' repeated Victor, ' because only deeds will convince the Grand Duke, and only deeds will lead him to show mercy.'

Achma's eyes burned with hatred. He remembered that Victor had frustrated his plans time after time, and had he the power he would have killed him there and then.

' I judged you rightly at the beginning,' he snarled, forgetting himself for the moment.

' Since you refer to that,' said Victor, ' I will admit you are right. And you and I have been at cross purposes ever since.'

' You deceived me,' said Achma. ' I will admit that you have beaten me at my own game. Even I was convinced you were a madman.'

' It is not only Turks who have patience,' replied Victor ; ' we both played to win.'

' And you think you have won ? '

' If I do not win, it is certain you will not.'

' What do you want ? '

He had cast off his mask now.

' I have something to tell you first,' and Victor's eyes grew hard. ' You have nothing to hope for in this world except through me.'

' You ! ' said Achma. ' What can *you* do ? '

' I can save your life,' said Victor.

The old man looked at him steadily for some seconds without replying. He was calculating warily, reckoning up the chances for and against him.

' You think I can do nothing, that I have no power,' went on the young man. ' You are mistaken. More than a year ago it was through such information as I gained that the Turks were driven back in their first great battle against the Russians. That made the Russian general my friend. You thought I was mad when I lay at your mercy in this city, and because of it I was not submitted to the tortures which you had in store for me. So far was I not mad that I obtained the plans of the forts which you thought invulnerable. I got through the Turkish lines; I placed those plans before the Grand Duke, and to-day the Russian army is in possession of your stronghold. Is it any wonder that Nicholas feels grateful to me, and that if I express a wish concerning you, whatever it may be, that wish shall be gratified ? '

' Ah ! you want to bargain with me ? ' And Achma heaved a sigh of satisfaction.

' I wish you to tell me first of all where the lady Adana Ulah is.'

' As Allah is my witness, and as I hope for Paradise, I know not.'

' That is your answer, your final answer ? '

' I speak only the truth.'

' Then I leave you. I go and tell the Grand Duke what you have said.'

' Stay,' said Achma quickly, ' do not be hasty. It may be that if I had my liberty I could find out. Crumbs of knowledge fell in my way whereby I could obtain information ; but I must have my liberty.'

' You will have no liberty until that lady is in safe keeping, in my keeping.'

' Surely my lord is unreasonable,' and Achma's voice became low and caressing. ' What can I know ? I am a prisoner, and—'

' I have no time to parley words,' and Victor's voice took on a sterner tone. ' Either you tell me at once where she is, or I go back to the Grand Duke, and he will give his commands concerning you.'

Achma gave another quick glance at Victor's face, and saw the mood he was in.

'And what assurance have I, if I tell you, that any mercy will be shown to me? What do you promise me?'

'I promise you nothing, save that I will plead for your life, and I believe my pleading will not be in vain.'

'And it is as worthless as thistledown,' and Achma snarled out the words.

'Then you do not accept my promise?'

'Why should I?'

'Because, if you do not, you will be dead before the sun goes down, and the days are very short.'

'Give me time,' said Achma, 'you are young, and you can become great. What is the love of a woman to you? And I have much knowledge; I could place information before you that would make you indispensable to your general. I could make you—'

'I give you one minute,' said Victor. 'You know where Adana Ulah is. If you do not tell me, I leave the room, and when I pass out your fate is sealed.'

He spoke without hesitation, because he was convinced that Achma knew. His words had revealed that fact.

The old Turk looked eagerly around the room, as if seeking for some means of escape. To bargain was the breath of life to him, and, true to his nature, he wanted to outwit the other. But another glance at Victor's face proved to him that his only hope lay in obedience.

'You've only half a minute more,' said Victor, 'and remember, whether you tell me or not, she will be found, even if every stone in Erzerum is razed to the ground.'

Achma scribbled some words on a piece of paper. 'You will find her there,' he said.

'If she is not,' replied the young man, 'your blood be upon your own head.'

'She is there,' was Achma's reply.

Half an hour later Victor found himself in one of the poorest parts of Erzerum. It was a district where beggars and thieves resorted in great numbers, and where the lowest and most degraded portion of the population lived. But he did not go alone. Behind him rode a number of Cossacks, who looked scornfully around on the fear-stricken Turks.

Victor entered the house indicated on the paper Achma had given him, while the owner of it cringed before him. He spoke a few words to him, and was immediately led to a big room which faced a filthy alley.

On entering he closed the door behind him, and saw a woman garbed in Turkish attire, with a look of despair in her eyes.

She started to her feet as she heard him and gazed at him eagerly, questioningly. Then her lips trembled and tears filled her eyes. A moment later she was sobbing in his arms.

For a moment Victor knew what heaven meant. He forgot everything, save that the woman he loved nestled at his heart, and uttered incoherent words. He did not think of Ethel Tregenna—thought of nothing, in fact, but his own happiness. After the long night of sorrow the morning had come. He was like a mariner who had sailed for years on a stormy sea and at last had arrived in a safe haven.

'Victor,' she cried, 'you will never leave me again, will you?'

The words were as sweet to him as the song of angels, but they also brought him infinite pain. He realized that she loved him, but he realized, too, that he had no right to accept it.

She saw the look in his eyes, saw anguish, despair, and misinterpreted it.

'Forgive me,' she cried, 'I—I did not know what I was doing. It's—it's so good of you to come to my help. I don't know—that is—'

'Come,' said Victor gently, 'I am taking you to friends. Urmia Erzinghan's mother awaits you.'

His words were stilted, cold, heartless, but she followed him without another word. Half an hour later he left her with his father's sister.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE GRAND DUKE'S COMMAND

'YES, your duty is plain.' It was the Grand Duke Nicholas who spoke. 'Asia Minor is at present no place for them. You say that your foster-father promised them a home in England. Take them there.'

'Yes, and then, your Highness, I will come back to you. Perhaps I can be of some service.'

The great soldier gave him a quick glance and read him like an open book. For Victor had told him the whole of his story from beginning to end, and the stern soldier had listened carefully. It was not often that this man of war paid heed to such stories. He was in the midst of stern work, and great responsibilities rested upon him. But he had listened willingly to Victor. Perhaps he remembered how much he owed to him.

'That is as the future may decide,' he said, 'but for the present your work here is done. You have served me well, and I am not ungrateful.'

Victor was silent. He could not understand the look in the Russian general's eyes.

'You will take those two women to England,' he said. 'From what I can learn, the American and his wife are already on their way there. You will take a letter which I shall give you to your War Office in London. You will naturally wish to spend some time with your foster-father.'

'And then,' said Victor, 'you will let me come back and serve under you again?'

'I do not know,' said the Grand Duke; 'it may be that the British Government will have other work for you. For my part, I think that for some time you have more important work to do than that of a soldier.'

Victor looked at him in astonishment. ‘What more important work can there be at such a time as this?’ he asked.

‘You came here to help your people,’ was the reply, ‘to try and ameliorate the sufferings of your race, and you found a wellnigh hopeless task. Three-fourths of the Armenians have either been murdered or sent to a lingering death. But there is a remnant which remains. Some half a million of them have escaped the devilry of the German scheme, and they live under our protection. But they are homeless, destitute, wellnigh forsaken. Nearly everything they had has been robbed from them; thousands of them are scattered amongst the mountains yonder in a state bordering on starvation.’

‘What can one do?’ asked Victor despairingly.

‘Russia is poor,’ replied the Grand Duke, ‘but England is rich. Even to carry on this great war we have to have help from your country. Therefore we can do nothing for your people. They need rehabilitation, they need help, such as people never needed before. But England is ignorant of their real condition. If the people of England knew the real facts——’

‘I see, I see,’ Victor almost shouted. ‘My father years ago went to England to tell the Armenian story, to plead for succour and help. Now the call is for me!’

‘Ah! you see, do you? I thought you would. Give six months to it. Tell your great country what has happened here, and what we have tried to do. And then, if your authorities will allow you, and I am alive, you shall, if you come back, receive a great welcome. But while I am helping them with the sword, you must help them with the pen and the tongue. With such experiences as yours, and with the memory of the sights you have seen, you should stir the whole nation, and you should bring light and gladness to hundreds of thousands of your oppressed and persecuted race. This is God’s work.’

Victor gazed at the great soldier in astonishment. He saw his lips quivering, saw the tears in his eyes. He had not believed that this great autocrat, this man, the nod of whose head meant life or death, disgrace or honour, to thousands, could show so much feeling.

‘Alexandropol,’ went on the Grand Duke, ‘as I have told you before, I have been spoken of as a man of iron, a man without

feeling, or sympathy, or care for anything except my own pleasure and my own ambition as a soldier. But the sufferings of your people have been so ghastly—but there, go. All arrangements have been made for you to travel to Petrograd, and across to Norway. From there you can easily get to Newcastle; then, in such a little country as England, it is only a few hours' journey to wherever you want to go. There is only one favour I would ask you before you go.'

'And that, your Highness.'

'Let me have your servant Yusef till you return East. He is a lad in a thousand.'

It was early in May when they arrived at Newcastle after a stormy voyage from Bergen. Throughout the passage many had been in fear of submarines and torpedoes, and when at length Victor stood on British soil again he felt like a man who had awakened from a horrible nightmare.

England! True it was not the England he had left. The streets were darkened, soldiers were everywhere, while on every hand were evidences that as a nation we were fighting for our lives. But it was still England! He heard his mother-tongue, he saw English houses, English people; he felt the English life. How strong, how reliable everything seemed! The prosperity, too, seemed wonderful. After the squalor, the tawdriness, the shabbiness of the Turkish Empire, England seemed like a mighty mountain, verdure-clad to the topmost summit, compared with a dust-heap made up of filth and foul garbage. Oh, yes, England was glorious!

He laughed as he heard the good-humoured raillery of the people, and almost shouted for joy as a newsboy cried his wares.

They stayed in Newcastle one night, and the next morning took the train for London.

'It's all so wonderful!' cried Adana as the train swept through the smiling, sunlit country. It is like a great beautiful garden. There is no dirt, no squalor, no poverty, no danger. England can never be invaded.'

'No,' replied Victor proudly, 'England can never be invaded!' He felt as though it was indeed his own country.

'England can laugh at the world, just laugh at it! I cannot

realize it : to be so rich, so strong ! But no one wants me. I am a stranger, I have no right here !'

The tears came to her eyes as she spoke. A feeling of loneliness oppressed her.

' But you have me, Adana,' said Urmia's mother. ' When we get to London we shall see Urmia and John. You will always have your own people. Besides, Admiral Trencrom is so good. When Victor left England nearly two years ago, he gave him a letter urging me to come to him, and telling me he would be a friend to me as he was to my brother.'

' Yes, to you and Urmia ; but he knows nothing of me !'

' But he will, darling. You are almost as much my own child as Urmia is. You will take her place.'

' No,' replied Adana, ' I cannot take her place. 'I—I—' and then she burst into convulsive sobs.

This was not like Adana. She had passed through the perils of the last two years with a brave heart. It was she who had made bold plans and executed them. When Urmia was timid and frightened it was she who had cheered her, and revived her courage. But now, when her dangers were over, and when she was in a land of freedom, she seemed to lose heart and give way to a passion of grief.

But this was not for long. The old look of resolution came to her eyes, and a few seconds later she was ministering to the comfort of others. All the same Victor could not understand her. She would not hear of accompanying him to Cornwall, and insisted that if John Lincoln and his wife, who were in London, would allow her, she would go with them to America, and make her home there until the war was over.

Arrived at King's Cross, they found John Lincoln and Urmia awaiting them. Victor had managed to communicate with them at their hotel, and now the young couple gave them a glad welcome.

' You stole a march on me,' said Victor with a laugh as he looked at the blushing girl.

' Yes, that was a bit of American hustle,' laughed John. ' I tell you I was nearly mad at the danger, and so I kept on pleading till I got her to consent. I say, Victor, you were a far-seeing fellow. I never dreamed that you knew I would give my eyes to

get her, and when you suggested it, it seemed a heaven-sent plan.

But Victor gave no hint as to what he had thought was the truth.

'Now about the future?' said John as presently they sat together in their hotel.

'I don't want to think about the future yet,' said Urmia's mother. 'I feel that I must live from day to day. England is so glorious, so great, so free, that I want just to rejoice in my safety and my liberty.'

'That's all right,' said John Lincoln. 'England's all very well in a small way. But what about America? *That* is a country! Besides Urmia will want you.'

'Americans have been very kind to us,' was the reply, and of course I shall want to go and see you often; but it is England who is fighting for us, it is in England that our hopes lie.'

'But you will live in America, won't you, Adana?' and Urmia caught her friend's arm.

'If you will let me,' replied the girl with a far-away look in her eyes.

'That is great!' laughed John. 'As for mother, when once she has been to America, she won't want to leave it.'

But Victor did not speak. The following morning he made his way to the War Office, and as soon as he was able left London for Cornwall.

'I guess you've told the Admiral you're coming,' said John Lincoln, who saw him off at Paddington.

'No, he knows nothing.'

'Nothing! Then I reckon you want to surprise him.'

But Victor was silent. Words seemed too poor to express his thoughts.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE OLD HOME

'**M**Y boy, my dear boy, it's wonderful, wonderful! It's a hundred times a miracle!'

They were sitting in the room at Trencrom where two years before the Admiral had made the revelation to Victor with which this history commenced. Looking through the windows Victor could see the trees he had climbed as a boy, the gardens in which he had romped, the fields and parklands he loved. In the near distance, he could hear the waves as they swept on the shore or hurled themselves on the cliffs. The peace, the beauty, the gladness of it all were beyond words.

He had arrived only a few hours before, and daylight had not yet gone. Never had he believed that the world possessed such beauty as he saw at Trencrom that day.

The Admiral was alone in the garden when Victor arrived. He had not the slightest idea his foster-son was in England, indeed as month had succeeded month, and he had heard nothing from him, he feared greatly concerning him.

Never, until he had left England, had the old man realized how dear Victor was to him. He had consented to his going to the East with comparative willingness, but when he was at length left alone he realized that his very life was bound up in the boy he had adopted. For the first few months after Victor had left he had received several letters from him; then came a long and terrible silence. War broke out, and postal communications between Asia Minor and England became exceedingly difficult. Still the Admiral kept praying and hoping for the boy's safety; but when so many long months had passed away, hope wellnigh died out. If he were alive, he often said to himself, he would find some way of letting him know.

As I have said, he was alone in the gardens at Trencrom on the evening Victor arrived. The young fellow had come by the Riviera Express, and had driven straight to the house. What Victor experienced on his way thither can be better felt than described. He knew every hill, every farmhouse, every turn in the lanes, and presently, as the vehicle entered the park gates, and he saw old Jonathan Coad pottering among the shrubs, a great sob rose in his throat. He had refrained from writing for a purpose : he wanted to give the old Admiral a joyful surprise. While in London he had made inquiries as to his welfare, and he felt sure his joy would be intensified by a sudden visit rather than by a message telling him of his arrival in London.

As the conveyance rolled slowly up to the house, the Admiral turned and watched it curiously, then, when Victor leapt out and rushed towards him, he could hardly believe his own eyes. For a few seconds the two stood looking at each other in silence ; then the old man's lips trembled and the tears welled up into his eyes.

' My own boy,' he sobbed, ' thank God you have come ! '

Of all the questions they asked each other, when they were at length calm enough to think of anything but their joy at seeing each other, I will not try to describe. Indeed, the Admiral seemed too excited to think connectedly. Even when in the middle of a question he would take hold of Victor's arm and look into his face, as if to be sure it was really he.

When dinner was over, however, and they were alone in the old library, Victor told his story. A hundred times during its recital the old man had laughed and cried ; now shouting exclamations of joy, and again uttering deep maledictions on the fiendishness of the Turks. To him it seemed impossible that any one could go through so much and live.

' My dear boy,' he cried repeatedly, ' it is wonderful ! It is a hundred times a miracle ! '

' But I have done nothing,' said Victor.

' Done nothing ! ' cried the Admiral. ' You have done impossible things ! Of course it was not in one's power to save a race at such a time, but you have done what you set out to do. You've brought your aunt and cousin home. You have rendered grand service to your country—great, glorious service, my boy. Oh, it

is good to have you back ! And to think you've actually been decorated by the Grand Duke ! Proud ! I should think I *am* proud !'

' He was very kind to me.'

' Kind to you ! He ought to be, after all you did and suffered ! And you say they received you well at our War Office ?'

' They were more than kind,' said Victor ; ' you see, I had no ordinary introduction. The letter from the Grand Duke acted like magic. I am given to understand that I shall be commanded to Buckingham Palace.'

The Admiral started to his feet in his joy. ' My boy, my boy,' he said, ' how I wish my wife had been alive to know this !'

' She does know it,' said Victor simply. ' My own father and mother know it, too.'

' Yes, yes, of course. Oh, Victor, it is great, *great* ! Well, what are you going to do now ? You will want to join the British Army, I expect—that is, after you've had a rest.'

' On the recommendation of the Grand Duke Nicholas, I am to be given six months' furlough. More if I want it.'

' Six months !' cried the Admiral. ' Yes, it is splendid !'

But a look of doubt came into his eyes. Staunch old patriot as he was—even although it was a joy beyond words to think of having the boy near him—he was not satisfied to know of any one belonging to him keeping away from the fighting forces at such a time.

' Six months,' he repeated slowly, ' yes, perhaps it's right ; anyhow, you've done your bit, my boy. If ever any one deserved rest, it is you.'

' I do not want rest,' said Victor ; ' I am not going to take it.'

' Not going to take it ! What do you mean ? Are you going to join the Army at once, then, in spite of him, or are you going back to the East again ?'

Victor was silent a few seconds, then he told him of what the Grand Duke Nicholas had said during their last interview.

' Dad,' said Victor, ' you don't know—no one can know, unless they have seen—the sufferings of my people. Sometimes I wake up in the night crying for help. I hear their agonized groans ; I see them again tortured as surely never people were tortured before. I imagine them wending their weary way footsore,

wounded, starving, towards a living death. I see men and women dropping and dying on the way. I see young mothers leaving their dead babies behind them. I hear German officers commanding Turkish soldiers to fire upon any who dare resist. I see outrages that are too terrible for description, and I nearly go mad.'

'It is those Germans at the back of it all,' shouted the Admiral; 'they are not men, they are devils! I knew it years before the war commenced. I told our people about it at the Admiralty; but no one would listen. They meant to conquer everybody, to grab everything, and no means was too hellish for them to use. No, no, we must never rest till their power is broken; there will be no peace and no safety until they are beaten.'

'Still,' he went on, after a pause, 'there has been a small remnant of your people saved. Thank God you had something to do with that, my boy.'

'Yes, but even they are still suffering terrible hardship. You see, they have been robbed of home, of property, of everything. It is true that some half a million of them are in safety behind the Russian lines. But if the Grand Duke had not succeeded in driving the Turks back south from Trebizond, and Erzerum, and Mush, and Van, scarcely an Armenian would be left to tell the tale. I have seen them, dad; I know their suffering, I know their needs. That is why I have been given this furlough.'

The Admiral looked at him in bewilderment; he did not understand.

'I am to be given every facility for making known the needs of my people,' said Victor. 'I am going to try to rouse the conscience of England and America. I am going to write a book, telling what I know. I am going to make arrangements whereby I can speak at great meetings, wherever people will come and listen to me. I know I am ill-fitted for the work, but—but, you see, I have heard their cries; I know their needs. They need money, they need food, and seed corn; they want to rebuild their houses, and to re-establish themselves in the land from which they have been driven. They are worthy of help, dad.'

Far into the night they talked, but Victor did not ask the one question which was trembling on his lips the whole time, and for some reason or other the Admiral never referred to it. Just as

they were going to bed, however, he took Victor by the arm and said gently, 'I am sorry to grieve you, my boy, but I have one bit of bad news for you.'

'Bad news, dad ?'

'Yes. I know how you thought about Ethel Tregenna when you left. Although no engagement existed between you, you—you—but there—'

'What's the matter ?' asked Victor. 'Is she—that is, has anything happened to her ?'

'Yes,' replied the Admiral.

'Is she dead ? You can't mean that !'

'No,' and the old man spoke savagely. 'But—but you had not left six months before—that is, directly after the war broke out—of course that fellow Magor joined the Army. It was right for him to do so. Of course no decent British lad could keep back. He was sent off to the front in a hurry, but—but before he went Ethel married him.'

'What ! Ethel married to Magor !'

'She married him,' repeated the old Admiral grimly. 'She has got a squalling baby now, but there, good night, my dear boy ; you are better off without her. Bless my soul, its after three o'clock in the morning, and you have been travelling all day ! What a brute I am to keep you up so long ! Breakfast at half-past eight, Victor ; don't be late.'

When Victor came down to breakfast the following morning he found the Admiral in a state of great excitement.

'A glorious day, my boy ; did you ever see the sky so clear ? No, not even in the East can you find a grander sky than that. Do you see the sea through the trees ? Oh, my boy, I *am* glad to see you back, and I am not going to let you do anything for at least a week. Oh, yes, I've settled that. I agree with all you say about your work, but I am going to have you idle for a week, and we'll paint this part of Cornwall red ; we will go everywhere and see everybody.'

'Dad, I am awfully sorry,' said Victor, 'but I must leave you at once.'

'Leave me at once, what nonsense !'

'I must. Will you lend me the car to run up to Truro ? I want to catch the London express.'

'What for, in Heaven's name ?'

'I want to see my aunt. I—I—'

'Useless, my boy. Your aunt and that—that girl—what do you call her ?—they're gone.'

'Gone ! Where ?' He almost gasped the words.

'How should I know ? I have just heard from them, they say they are leaving London this morning.'

'What, for good ?'

'No, not for good. They will return there again, I expect ; at least, that is their intention.'

'But—but how did you hear this ?'

'Telephone, long-distance call,' cried the Admiral. 'Now, my boy, sit down to breakfast. I am not going to hear a word more about them. They're all right. I've got *you* now.'

Throughout the day the Admiral found Victor, in spite of his joy at being back again, strangely silent. He seemed to take but little interest in the improvements on the estate, or the condition of certain old labourers whom the old man grew eloquent about. But he appeared to pay no heed to Victor's gloom. He laughed continuously, talked incessantly, and was evidently in the highest of spirits.

'Of course you are naturally down in the dumps about Ethel Tregenna jilting you,' he said, 'but don't you worry about that, my boy. "Out of sight, out of mind," is the motto of some girls. Would you like to go and see her ? I would suggest that you should stand godfather to the baby, only some one else has taken on the job. Yes, she is still at Tregenna ; that was the only condition on which her father would allow her to marry Magor. Oh, yes, the beggar's turned up trumps. He has got his Captaincy. You won't go, then ? Are you good for a game of billiards, or shall we have a run in the car ? Let's see, to-day is Wednesday, and to-morrow will be too soon—'

'Too soon for what ?' asked Victor wonderingly.

'Oh, for a great jollification. Do you think I am going to let you live like a hermit here with nothing but a silly old man for company ? I am going to invite the whole countryside ; we are going to be *en fête*, my boy ; we are going to welcome the prodigal back with shouts of rejoicing, don't you see ?'

'It is only forced gaiety,' thought Victor. 'He thinks I am

grieving about Ethel Tregenna, and he wants to drive all such thoughts from my mind. Heavens, if he only knew how glad I am !'

Soon after three o'clock the Admiral informed him that he must leave him. 'I have an important appointment for an hour or two, my boy,' he said, 'but I shall be back for dinner; don't you fear, I shall be back for dinner. You won't be lonely while I am away, will you ? It will only be for an hour or two. Ah, we live in wonderful times, wonderful times !'

'I see you have got the big car out,' said Victor, looking at the great Rolls-Royce which stood at the door.

'Yes, that big car is my one extravagance. I paid a lot of money for it ; but it's worth it, my boy, it's worth it. Oh, we'll paint the county red ! There, I am off !'

When he had gone Victor found his way to the sea, and sat for a long time looking out on the sunlit waves. In some senses it seemed only yesterday since he had left England ; in others it was so long that all life was changed. He had gone away a boy, ignorant of the great crises of life ; he had come back with new purposes in his life, new determinations in his heart. Those two years in Asia Minor had revolutionized his being. They had filled him with a great wonder.

He could not understand Adana's sudden departure from London. What did it mean ? He thought much about her behaviour since they had left Erzerum. Her manner had been cold and constrained towards him, and she had persistently refused to be alone with him. He had heard with dismay her determination to go to America with John Lincoln and Urmia, but he could do nothing, say nothing. His remembrance of Ethel Tregenna had put a seal upon his lips. After the Admiral had told him that she had married Magor, however, his way had been made plain. Hence his sudden determination to go to London, and to tell her what was in his heart. Did she care for him, he wondered, or had he been mistaken ?

He called to mind her glad abandonment when he had entered that room in Erzerum, after the fall of the city ; remembered, too, the joy that filled his life. But that joy only lasted a few seconds, for his duty to Ethel Tregenna killed it. Adana, too, had seemed suddenly to remember herself, and had become cold and con-

strained. What was the cause of it? Was her manifestation of feeling owing to her sudden delivery from danger? Or was it because——? No, he had been a fool. She had always shown a preference for Lincoln.

He found his way back towards the house again, but the spring flowers and the glorious May afternoon brought him no gladness. There was a sense of utter loneliness in his life. Even the thought of the great work he had planned brought him but little consolation.

Then suddenly he heard shouts of laughter and the tooting of a motor-horn. Looking, he saw, through the trees, the Admiral's Rolls-Royce coming swiftly towards him.

'Who has he got there, I wonder?' he asked himself. 'Oh, I hope he has not—I hope he is not filling the house with visitors.' Then his heart gave a wild leap.

'I say, Victor,' it was John Lincoln who spoke, 'this is a bit of American hustling, isn't it? My word, this is a great place! You see we've all come.'

'Yes,' cried the Admiral, 'but it seems to me that it was I who did the hustling. I got these people out of their beds at seven o'clock this morning. I was ringing up the call-office at 6. It took half an hour to get through to their hotel, and then the whole lot of them were frightened out of their wits, by hearing that they were wanted on the telephone. They wanted at least a day to make preparations, they said, but I wouldn't have it! We British slow, are we? Not a bit of it. "Why do you want a day to make preparations?" I said. "The Riviera Express leaves at eleven o'clock—catch it. I will meet you at Truro," and here they are. I told Victor that for a week he must not do a stroke of work, so what more natural than that he should have his old friends with him! Isn't this God's country, Mrs. Erzinghan? Did you ever see anything as beautiful in your life? What are you two girls crying about? You're as welcome as the flowers, and, please God, you shall have a bit of happiness after all your suffering.' Whereupon, after his long speech, Admiral Trenckrom mopped his eyes vigorously.

'Adana,' said Victor an hour later, 'I often spoke to you about my old home when we were out there,' and he nodded eastward.

'Let me show you some of it, shall I?' and Adana, who had scarcely spoken a word since her coming, and who had looked piteously from one to the other as though she doubted her welcome, went quietly away by his side. For some time they walked in silence.

'There, you can see the house perfectly from here,' said Victor presently; 'isn't it beautiful?'

But she spoke no word. It might be that the thought of her own helplessness made speech impossible.

'Adana,' went on Victor, 'I want to tell you something, may I? Look, from here we can see the sea through the trees.'

He led her to a seat which had been placed around an old gnarled oak. 'I want to tell you what I have never dared to tell you before,' he said; 'I want to tell you why I have never told it you.'

The girl's great dark eyes turned upon him wonderingly. She had never seen him look as he looked then.

'No, no; do not tell me!' and her voice trembled.

'Why?' asked Victor.

'I—I don't know. I think I am afraid. You see it is all so beautiful, all so wonderful, and there is no danger here. Your country is so peaceful, so strong, in spite of the war, and I—I feel so helpless.'

Her words drove all he had intended to say out of Victor's mind; all the fine phrases he had thought of were forgotten.

'Are you going to stay here?' she went on. 'I didn't want to come—you see, I am so useless. But now you have brought us back to safety, what are you going to do?'

He did not want to speak about this a bit, but he told her of his plans, of the book he was going to write, of the way he was going to make known the wants of his people.

'I am going to devote my life to it, Adana,' he said. 'My father lived to help Armenia, that is what I am going to do. It is the work God has given me to do, and I must do it.'

'Yes,' she replied, her eyes flashing, 'it is your work, and it's the greatest, grandest work in the world.'

Victor started to his feet, like one angry. 'But don't you know, can't you see, Adana,' he cried, 'I—I—Look here, won't you help me?'

'Help you? Oh, if I only could! But—but what can a girl do?'

'Love me,' cried the boy, 'love me as I love you! There, that is what I have been trying to say this last hour, what I have wanted to say for nearly two years. Haven't you seen it, didn't you know it, Adana? You are all the world to me, more—more than anything, everything! Love me—love me—love me!'

The girl's face became as pale as death. 'Let me look at you,' she cried, and there was a gleam of the passion of the East in her eyes. 'Let me be sure!' She rose to her feet as she spoke and looked into his eyes. 'You do, you do!' she gasped. 'Oh, Victor, from the first moment I saw you, I—I—'

But Victor did not wait for her to finish the sentence. He held out his arms, and she came to him with glad joy.

'I knew, I knew!' laughed the Admiral a little later. 'Do you think I am in my dotage? Do you think the old man's eyes are so blind that he can't see? Last night, when you were telling me about her, I knew. I read your heart like a book, my boy. That was why I telephoned this morning. I said, "God bless the boy, he shall have his heart's desire. The girl who could do what she did, who could suffer, and think, and play such a part, is the girl for my boy!" I say, come here, my dear, and kiss your old dad. There, you shall do all you have in your heart to do, and by and by, in God's good time, when peace comes and wrongs are righted, this old home shall be your home!'

THE END



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